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and an
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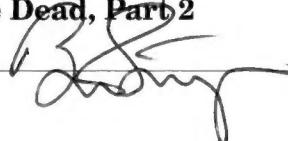
February 1997

science fiction & fantasy

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Let's Hear it for the Mainstream

Thoughts occasioned by Brian Stableford's review in this issue of a debut novel, *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell (pg 56):

Is there any point in us clinging to the label "science fiction" after all these years? The world at large persists in calling it "sci-fi" and in assuming, as far as books are concerned, that it designates little more than a welter of *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek* and *X-Files* spinoffs. Sci-fi, they say, is escapist trash for slightly "sad" young people who wear anoraks. When a writer does break out of the enclave he or she immediately ceases to be sci-fi and becomes an author *sui generis* (although the label "cyberpunk" retains a certain *chic*). The last to gain such mainstream acceptance was William Gibson, who rode to fame on the rising self-esteem of a generation of computer enthusiasts. In Britain, Iain Banks's mainstream credibility was gained in the mainstream, with *The Wasp Factory*, and has been reinforced by such later successes as *The Crow Road*; his sf novels, by and large, are ignored.

There was a time, an all-too-brief period stretching at best from the 1950s to the early 1970s, when the science-fiction genre was relatively fashionable among outsiders. That halcyon period began, perhaps, with Ray Bradbury's "break-out" and ended (in Britain, at any rate) with the apparent dissolution of New Wave sf into the avant-garde mainstream (J. G. Ballard's *Crash* may represent an end point). Before 1950 sf as a genre was almost invisible except to a few pulp-magazine fans – in so far as it was noticed at all, it was just "that crazy *Buck Rogers* stuff"; and since the mid-1970s it has become *infra dig* once more – that trashy *Star Trek*/*Star Wars* stuff. Ursula Le Guin may be cited as the last break-out author before the special case of Gibson, but the quasi-acceptable "feminist sf" she trailed in her wake (*Joanna Russ, et al*) soon fizzled out as far as mainstream visibility is concerned.

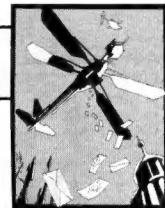
And yet there never has been a time, during the whole course of this century, when sf novels have not been written, and in reasonable quantity, by mainstream authors. Almost none of them, from H. G. Wells and Jack London at the beginning of the century, through Olaf Stapledon, Aldous Huxley, C. S. Lewis and others in the century's first half, to the "mainstreamers" of today such as Marge Piercy or Mary Doria Russell, have thought of themselves as science-fiction writers. They did not belong to the sf enclave, which came into existence circa 1930 thanks to the efforts of editor Hugo Gernsback (or, more to the point, thanks to the need of the US pulp-magazine fiction industry to carve itself new specialized

market niches in the face of rising competition from the movies and radio); and nor did they – nor do they – feel any need to belong. They are, overwhelmingly, writers with *something to say*, an urgent message to be delivered, and in their eyes any process of genre labelling will only muffle that message.

Let's just consider the last 48 years, since George Orwell wrote what is still, probably, the century's best-known English-language novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The "children of Orwell" – if one can call them that without being taken too literally – have produced such books as:

Earth Abides by George R. Stewart (1949)
The Age of Longing by Arthur Koestler (1951)
The Disappearance by Philip Wylie (1951)
You Shall Know Them (Borderline)
by Vercors (1952)
Limbo ('90) by Bernard Wolfe (1952)
One by David Karp (1953)
Love Among the Ruins by Evelyn Waugh (1953)
The Long Way Back by Margot Bennett (1954)
The Big Ball of Wax by Shepherd Mead (1954)
Messiah by Gore Vidal (1954)
The Inheritors by William Golding (1955)
The Twenty-Seventh Day by John Mantley (1956)
The Seventh Day by Hans Hellmut Kirst (1957)
Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand (1957)
The Egghead Republic by Arno Schmidt (1957)
On the Beach by Nevil Shute (1957)
After the Rain by John Bowen (1958)
Two Hours to Doom (Red Alert) by Peter George (1958)
The Joy Wagon by Arthur T. Hadley (1958)
On the Last Day by Mervyn Jones (1958)
The Centenarians by Gilbert Phelps (1958)
The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033 by Michael Young (1958)
Inter Ice Age 4 by Kobo Abe (1959)
The Funhouse by Benjamin Appel (1959)
The Last Day by Helen Clarkson (1959)
Alas, Babylon by Pat Frank (1959)
Providence Island by Jacquette Hawkes (1959)
The Lunatic Republic by Compton Mackenzie (1959)
Level 7 by Mordecai Roshwald (1959)
When the Kissing Had to Stop
by Constantine FitzGibbon (1960)
Facial Justice by L. P. Hartley (1960)
The Child Buyer by John Hersey (1960)
Breakthrough by John Iggylden (1960)
What We Did to Father (The Evolution Man)
by Roy Lewis (1960)
Come Out to Play by Alex Comfort (1961)
The Unsleep by Diana & Meir Gillon (1961)
The Purple Armchair by Olga Hesky (1961)
If the South Had Won the Civil War
by MacKinlay Kantor (1961)
The Voice of the Dolphins by Leo Szilard (1961)
The Old Men at the Zoo by Angus Wilson (1961)
Fail-Safe by Eugene L. Burdick & Harvey Wheeler (1962)
A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess (1962)
Memoirs of a Spacewoman
by Naomi Mitchison (1962)
The Time Before This by Nicholas Monsarrat (1962)
rat (1962)
The Crucified City by Peter van Greenaway (1962)
When the Whites Went by Robert Bateman (1963)
Planet of the Apes by Pierre Boulle (1963)
Seconds by David Ely (1963)
The Man Who Fell to Earth by Walter Tevis (1963)
The Year of the Angry Rabbit by Russell Braddon (1964)
Mandrake by Susan Cooper (1964)
The Red Dust by Bee Baldwin (1965)
Journal from Ellipsia by Hortense Calisher (1965)
One by One by Penelope Gilliatt (1965)
Epp by Axel Jensen (1965)
Not With a Bang by Chapman Pincher (1965)
The Tale of the Great Computer
by Olof Johannesson (1966)
Kings of Infinite Space by Nigel Balchin (1967)
Queen Victoria's Bomb by Ronald Clark (1967)
Termush by Sven Holm (1967)
The Hole in the Zero by M. K. Joseph (1967)
Ice by Anna Kavan (1967)
The Windobeys Lama Toru by Lee Tung (1967)
The Day of the Dolphin by Robert Merle (1967)
The Man Who Cried I Am
by John A. Williams (1967)
The Ice People by René Barjavel (1968)
Tunc and Nunquam by Lawrence Durrell (1968, 1970)
A Very Private Life by Michael Frayn (1968)
They by Marya Mannes (1968)
The "Lomokome" Papers by Herman Wouk (1968)
Heroes and Villains by Angela Carter (1969)
The Andromeda Strain by Michael Crichton (1969)
The Coming Self-Destruction of the USA by Alan Seymour (1969)
Intensive Care by Janet Frame (1970)
This Perfect Day by Ira Levin (1970)
The Gods of Foxcroft by David Levy (1970)
The Bodyguard by Adrian Mitchell (1970)
The Indians Won by Martin Cruz Smith (1970)
The Throne of Saturn by Allen Drury (1971)
Love in the Ruins by Walker Percy (1971)
Travels in Nihilon by Allan Sillitoe (1971)
Little Dog's Day by Jack Trevor Story (1971)
Triage by Leonard C. Lewin (1972)
Rule Britannia by Daphne du Maurier (1972)
Catholics by Brian Moore (1972)
Regiment of Women by Thomas Berger (1973)
Joshua Son of None by Nancy Freedman (1973)
Experiment at Proto (The Proto Papers) by Philip Oakes (1973)
Ecotopia by Ernest Callenbach (1975)
Morrow's Ants by Edward Hyams (1975)
Hitler Has Won by Frederic Mullally (1975)
End Product by Barry Norman (1975)
The Tomorrow File by Lawrence Sanders (1975)
The Alteration by Kingsley Amis (1976)
The Hospital Ship by Martin Bax (1976)
Rattner's Star by Don DeLillo (1976)
The HAB Theory by Allan W. Eckert (1976)
The Crash of '79 by Paul E. Erdman (1976)
Woman on the Edge of Time
by Marge Piercy (1976)
Unnatural Fathers by Catherine Storr (1976)
Xanthe and the Robots by Sheila MacLeod (1977)
Altered States by Paddy Chayefsky (1978)
SS-GB by Len Deighton (1978)
The Earth Again Redeemed by Martin

Interface



Green (1978)
Dance of the Tiger by Bjorn Kurten (1978)
The Far Arena by Richard Ben Sapir (1978)
The New Gulliver by Esmé Dodderidge (1979)
Benefits by Zoe Fairbairns (1979)
Canopus in Argos: Shikasta
 by Doris Lessing (1979)
A Secret History of Time to Come
 by Robie MacAuley (1979)
Island Paradise by Kathy Page (1979)
The Summer People by Janice Elliott (1980)
Riddley Walker by Russell Hoban (1980)
Gor Saga by Maureen Duffy (1981)
Easy Travel to Other Planets by Ted Mooney (1981)
Bugs by Theodore Roszak (1981)
The Godmothers by Sandi Hall (1982)
Pryche by Amanda Hemingway (1982)
God's Grace by Bernard Malamud (1982)
The Terrible Twos by Ishmael Reed (1982)
Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica by J. C. Batchelor (1983)
The Rape of Shavi by Buchi Emecheta (1983)
Long Voyage Back by Luke Rhinehart (1983)
Elleander Morning by Jerry Yulsman (1983)
The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood (1985)
A Creed for the Third Millennium by Colleen McCullough (1985)
Xorandor by Christine Brooke-Rose (1986)
The Man Who Mastered Time by David Butler (1986)
The Last Election by Pete Davies (1986)
Goodman 2020 by Fred Pfeil (1986)
O-Zone by Paul Theroux (1986)
Moscow 2084 by Vladimir Voinovich (1986)
Einstein's Monsters by Martin Amis (1987)
The Child in Time by Ian McEwan (1987)
Smiles and the Millennium by Miranda Miller (1987)
Memoirs of an Invisible Man by H. F. Saint (1987)
Golden Days by Carolyn See (1987)
The War Against Chaos by Anita Mason (1988)
Portal: A Dataspace Retrieval by Rob Swigart (1988)
The Sykaos Papers by E. P. Thompson (1988)
First Light by Peter Ackroyd (1989)
Nightshade by Jack Butler (1989)
Stark by Ben Elton (1989)
The Cloning of Joanna May by Fay Weldon (1989)
The Emperor of America by Richard Condon (1990)
The Sixth Day and Other Tales by Primo Levi (1990)
Frankenstein's Children by David Mace (1990)
And All the King's Men by Gordon Stevens (1990)
Birthright by Michael Stewart (1990)
Where Are the Snows? by Maggie Gee (1991)
Empire of the Ants by Bernard Werber (1991)
Poor Things by Alasdair Gray (1992)
Fatherland by Robert Harris (1992)
The Children of Men by P. D. James (1992)
Resurrections from the Dustbin of History by Simon Louvish (1992)
Sing the Body Electric by Adam Lively (1993)
The First Century After Beatrice by Amin Maalouf (1993)
Raptor Red by Robert T. Bakker (1995)
Gridiron by Philip Kerr (1995)
Idlewild, or Everything is Subject to Change by Mark Lawson (1995)
The Keepers by Pauline Kirk (1996)
The Truth Machine by James L. Halperin (1996)

Need I go on? This list is limited to one mention per author. There are scores of other examples, by these and other writers; and then there are all those works that one might place in

what Bruce Sterling has called the "slipstream" (fabulations, metafiction, etc): books by John Barth, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon and so on. Leaving the latter aside, avoiding fantasy and "magic realism," virtually all of the above-listed works are science fiction, by our definitions, and yet almost none of them were conceived or marketed as such. Of course, these books vary enormously; some are "literary" fiction, others are popular thrillers or comedies; but almost all have something to say. Quite a few were very well reviewed, and an astonishing number of them succeeded in becoming bestsellers. A handful of them are masterpieces.

Moreover, I would contend that if the science-fiction genre had never come into existence, these books would still have been written. If Hugo Gernsback and John W. Campbell and Donald A. Wollheim had never lived, if Robert A. Heinlein and Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke had never produced a word, most of the above books would still exist, taking their inspiration as they do from Wells and Huxley and Orwell, and – more importantly – from the historical, sociological and technological facts of our century.

Within the genre hothouse, it has always been the fashion to knock the sf efforts of outsiders – they are accused of "re-inventing the wheel," of fudging their science, and so on – but the fact remains that their books have been more successful than those of genre writers: they have helped shape millions of minds. In time, even we within the genre have taken some of them (the best of them) to our bosoms.

Think of the post-war decade, for example: it would seem immensely the poorer without such mainstream masterpieces as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Stewart's *Earth Abides*, Wolfe's *Limbo* and Golding's *The Inheritors* (still four of the finest sf novels ever written, in my opinion), not to mention Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (a mainstream debut by a writer of short stories for *Collier's*, even if the author later came to be perceived as "genre" thanks to a handful of stories in *Galaxy* and *F&SF*). Obviously, as the editor of an avowed sf magazine I am playing devil's advocate here, but I put it to you: haven't many of the best things always been done by people who are without the sf genre, or who have had a very uneasy relationship with the genre (Vonnegut, Stanislaw Lem, Ballard, Christopher Priest)? Isn't this, after all, how it should be? Isn't it time we recognized the fact and put "sci-fi" behind us?

David Pringle

Errata

We very much regret the gremlins that crept into issue 115 and removed the final line from the interview with Jeff Noon – the last sentence should have read:

If I was to sum my work up – *Vurt* is for the hip, *Pollen* for the mad, *Automated Alice* for the innocent, and *Nymphomation* for the perverse! ■

In the same issue, on page 59 in the right hand column, a meaningless opening parenthesis and a part of the preceding quotation replace a full stop in Chris Gilmore's review. We apologise to Chris and any confused readers.

+ Interaction + Interaction +

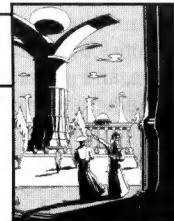
Dear Editors:

It seems to me that readers may form a rather misleading impression of my magazine, *The Edge* 3, from reading the review in *Interzone* 114 (page 59). As *The Edge* is a business venture – a "semi-prozine," if you must, intended to pay its editors and writers reliable and reasonable fees for their work – I don't want to see potential subscribers discouraged. The piece is full of inaccuracies:

"Few subscribers," etc: As your reviewer, Andy Cox, well knows, next year we will be paying the same rates as *IZ*, £30 per thousand words, for published fiction. It should surely be obvious that we sell a considerable number of each issue. The magazine of whose contributors I said it was "unfortunate" they had been "around for years" was a small press with an avowed policy of publishing "new writers." I am quoted out of context. Letters by "cronies": It was a correspondent who thought the inclusion of "cunt" in a story "daring" – my reply made my disagreement clear. There are "no unknown writers," therefore *The Edge* is "a fanzine." I find the logic hard to grasp. And where do I criticise *IZ*? Or "sully" the reputation of other magazines? I've received just

about every small press since – apart from Cox's. And why are the editors of these magazines my "colleagues"? And of course, *The Edge* 3 has 44 pages, not 40.

I believe in responsible reviewing, which is why I appended an editorial note to the magazine listings, advising readers not to assume that "these [magazines] are anything like *The Edge*." Those listed are quite different to *The Edge*. They publish mostly writers whose work has yet to appear in professionally published, high-street form, many of whom can be said to be learning their craft. They exist in a variety of formats, from dot-matrix typeset and photocopied, to dtp and printshop production. They rarely seem to be line-edited or proof-read; a simple computer spellcheck appears to be the norm. *The Edge* is thoroughly edited, professionally typeset and printed and, for the most part, written and edited by established, professional writers. It is intended to represent a discerning selection of imaginative, genre-orientated fiction and non-fiction, and I believe I give no reason to "suppose" that



letters continue overleaf

The Edge offers an "alternative" to professional standards. I only publish new writers when the fiction from such is of a sufficient standard. In fact, some exceptional stories by new writers appear in the next couple of issues.

Graham Evans

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Belle Vue, Chelmsford
Essex CM2 0BS

Dear Editors:

The recent correspondence in your columns about television sf is rather bewildering. It doesn't matter about five-year story arcs or any other such mumbo-jumbo. Simply put, fiction is addictive because it is exactly like real life except that it gives us the chance to involve ourselves with other people's lives – we can pry, spy and eavesdrop, and judge the characters in any fiction to our hearts' content – without ever having to become entangled in the plot with them. Serial fiction is thus easiest, because we don't even have to learn new characters all the time.

Now, reading does involve a certain amount of work: choosing and buying the next book or magazine, and finding a place and a time to read it. Watching television minimizes even this; all you have to do is be home and turn the set on at the right time. Thus television fiction is even easier. And, given the above, TV serials and soap operas are the easiest and most addictive of all.

Realizing all this, I am very careful about watching any new TV programme. I don't want to become addicted to something that turns out to be rubbish, because the law of cognitive dissonance operates – that which we choose voluntarily but arbitrarily we will find reasons to like rather than admit we were wrong. My first filter is that I only watch programmes that fall into a few strict categories, and one of these is science fiction.

And here we arrive at the present impasse. *Babylon 5* has many devoted viewers because of its five-year story arc. But it is perfectly plain from the above that Straczynski has simply noted the disadvantage of serial TV fiction addiction, and turned it into a benefit – a ploy familiar to anyone who has had sales-training or computer-programming experience. And all those who, like me, don't watch *B-5*, have probably watched early episodes, occasionally dipped in again, and decided against investing any time or emotional commitment in something that was so badly written, acted, and special-effected. Surely all this is evidenced by the fact that you never meet anyone who just watches *B-5*: they either don't watch it, or are addicts.

I speak as a long-time *Star Trek* addict; I even had cable TV installed so I could watch *ST:TNG* every day (and *ST:DS9* on Sky 2 every day as well at the moment). And I was actually stimulated to write by your remark in *IZ* 115 that no one had commented on the recent Neil Gaiman and Iain Banks TV efforts. You see, I watched both of these because of the minimal serial commitment I had to

make, and I have to say that they are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Gaiman's story of London Below, *Neverwhere* (hereinafter known as *Underwear*), is probably the worst, while Banks's *The Crow Road* is probably the best drama that has been on UK TV in 1996. Which is to say, I was glad when *Underwear* ended, while I didn't want *Crow Road* to end at all.

The problem with *Underwear* is that the characterization is so shallow. People walk off and leave our hero at every turn; desperation for company seems to be his sole motive for following them, and yet he still misses them when he has to return to the real world. And this was the length and depth of the serial's characterization, so that, no matter how much the young protagonists emoted, the show was stolen by the grotesques who had nothing to do but go over the top to gain the whole attention of the audience.

Conversely, in *The Crow Road* we had a story of skilfully drawn characters who, bumping into each other in the darkness of their own lack of understanding, only find the light of day by holding hands. Despite which, Banks's devotion to machines (surely also the engine of his sf, if I may coin a phrase) is paramount: the story begins with a joke about granny's pacemaker exploding, and partly defines each character by the vehicle they drive. Banks even manages to make ancient computers interesting, and the leading baddie commits suicide by means of the machine which is most conspicuously the symbol of his success.

Perhaps it is precisely because Banks's story is so engaging and Gaiman's is so uninteresting that the one really powerful social comment of either comes from *Underwear*. All the denizens of London Below are invisible to those above because they have no status. This is true and powerful and telling for those of us who see the beggars of London everyday. But not helpful. For all their champagne socialism, the characters in *The Crow Road* care about one another, agonize over different standards, and eventually learn; and along with them we learn too, if we want to. Gaiman reveals nothing. Given the fascinating setting of London Below – London extends as much if not more below ground as it does above, and is far more interconnected than its upwards extrusions – and the raggle-taggle cast, we could expect a fascinating exposition of contemporary society's ills. Instead of which, Gaiman simply uses the down-and-outs and the stunning setting combined with lots of jokes about London's place-names to spin a vacuous fantasy that, with its long static set-pieces, largely off-screen action, and stereotypical characters, resembles nothing so much as a modern pseudo-realistic comic. This is probably exactly what it is, but if the BBC's promotion budget is any guide, they must have spent a lot of money on making this series too, and it's such a pity that it doesn't show.

You have stated (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) in these pages that as a fan of *EastEnders* you think all good TV fiction

aspire to the condition of soap opera. I think you are probably wrong in the use of the verb "aspire." Certainly, all good TV tends to the condition of soap opera because the programme-makers want us to keep watching. Rather, I would say that all good TV aspires to the condition of sf. It is easy enough to make serial fictions. It is more difficult to make them attract and keep a loyal audience (*EastEnders* is undoubtedly the best of current soaps, but lost my interest completely just a year ago). It is more difficult still to make them interesting as well, and most difficult of all to make them meaningful.

Soaps can meet many of these strictures, but usually fall at the "meaningful" fence. This is because they are too realistic. Science fiction is based in our reality, otherwise we wouldn't be able to understand what is going on. But it has to be different, or it isn't science fiction; one guarantee of the future is that it will not be like now (many of us are old enough to know just how different this future is from our own childhoods). It is at this point that good science fiction becomes meaningful – this disjunction between the perceived real and the science-fictional real that Darko Suvin terms cognitive estrangement. Because, although it is unreal, we can learn about the real from it. Herein lies the good in good sf, and it is present in *The Crow Road* – the constant presence of Uncle Rory in Prentice McHoan's perception is just fantastic enough a device to give the mysterious family history a frisson of the strange, and really make an audience sit up and pay attention.

I see little in the way of cognitive estrangement in *Babylon 5* (or *Earth 2*, or *Red Dwarf*, or even some episodes of *Star Trek*). I see it occasionally enough to keep me watching in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *ST:DS9* (recently dubbed *Little House on the Wormhole* in this house), and, most significantly, in the sitcom *Third Rock from the Sun* (reviewed by me in *Interzone* 111).

And this is why I am bewildered by the recent letters. Discussing the relative merits of *B-5*'s five-year story arc and the elongated Federation history implicit in the various manifestations of *Star Trek* is analogous to discussing the relative merits of smoking and drinking, and about as interesting; both are bad for you, particularly if you become addicted, and I could give up any of them tomorrow (although *Star Trek*/booze would be a wrench). Is there any more to say?

Paul Brazier

Brighton

Editor: I'll just comment that despite your poor opinion of *Babylon 5*, there are some academics who evidently have a good deal more to say about it: in the latest issue of *Foundation* (no. 68, Autumn 1996), editor Edward James announces a conference on *Babylon 5* to be held in York on 13th December 1997. Details from, and offers of papers to, Farah Mendlesohn, Faculty of Humanities, University College of Ripon and York St John, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO3 7EX (e-mail fm7@york.ac.uk).

Refugees from an

I first met Stephen Taylor in college, shortly after his first comic strip nearly got the entire staff of the campus newspaper fired, if not expelled. I found it leaning against the door of *The Villanova* office one morning, in a large, flat envelope he must have placed there the previous night. As I sat at my desk, examining panel after panel in slack-jawed amazement, realized I had something *very* special here. There were ten panels in all, each on a separate piece of stiff poster board, way oversized, filled with hundreds of figures, fantastic detail, images spreading along the edges like the marginal doodles in *Mad* magazine.

Fellow staffers gathered around. Joe Meese, the editor, mumbled something to the effect that the intricate line-work might not reproduce. ("We'll do it real big," I said. "A two-page spread.") Fran Hamilton's comment best summed up what we all were feeling.

"Holy shit..."

The strip was called *Stephanus*. It wasn't signed, but the artist had executed a what I guessed was intended to be a self-portrait in the first panel, depicting himself dangling naked in a dungeon, nailed to an overhead beam by a single spike through both wrists. The face was round, soft, and boyish, with dark, tangled hair and huge dark eyes; the expression one of absolute, wrenching despair and bewilderment. He looked a little like Dondi, the war-orphan from that sappy newspaper strip, only a older – Dondi grows up and goes to Hell, I thought.

It got worse. Blood streamed down his emaciated body and pooled in a patch of light several inches below his feet, where rats gathered to drink. The blood became a river, pouring along the margins and into the next panel. Monsters swam in it, devouring escapees from burning ships. The ships themselves were shaped like idiotic, vacuous human faces, or like cupped hands or severed, upside-down feet. Menacing, dark cities loomed along the river's banks, rooftops silhouetted against background fires, the flame-lit streets crammed with absurdly hideous images. Burning heads on spikes over doorways, their features stapled or safety-pinned into happy-face smiles. In a public square, a cute cartoon duck in a sailor suit was being broken on the wheel by masked executioners, while

Hunting
Country

Darrell Schweitzer

kiddie ducklings writhed in a semi-circle around them, impaled up the anus on spears. Rat-faced citizens fornicated on rooftops or in upstairs rooms, but always with malicious intent, sometimes devouring one another. One male-thing had apparently achieved simultaneous climax and death by chopping off its lover's head with a cleaver, then burying its face so deeply in the spurting neck that it drowned. Meanwhile, a cartoon bomb covered with lipstick kisses fizzled away under the bed. Human and rat children alike cut their parents (and infant siblings) apart with chainsaws or drove spikes through their eyes. In a hospital maternity ward, one rat mother sat up in bed, flaying her newborn with surgical knives, without even detaching the umbilical cord first. In the background, a nurse went from crib to crib with a smoking pot, ladling hot oil on the screaming infants.

"This guy is *really* sick," said Joe Meese.

"Yeah, but he's great," I said.

Imagine Hieronymous Bosch as a follower of Robert Crumb, and you'll begin to understand what I held in my hands. It must have taken the artist weeks to create all this: elderly humans naked but for funny hats like something out of Dr Seuss, chained waist-deep in rain-barrels of fly-swarming offal; rat-things vomiting from the city wharfs. The bloody river flowed on into the final panel – a huge, half-page vertical – and there splashed over the pearl-encrusted slippers of a monstrous rat in royal robes with a wreath of thorns growing out of its head. In one hand, the rat king held a sceptre – on which the artist's gaping, hopeless face was again reproduced – and in the other, a dripping severed penis.

At the bottom of the panel, in big, ragged letters: NEXT WEEK! MORE HOLIDAY FUN IN THE INFERNAL REPUBLIC OF CHORAZIN!

"I mean, *fucked up*," said Joe Meese, in tones of awed admiration.

This was, after all, the age of underground comics: Crumb, S. Clay Wilson, Vaughn Bode, Gilbert Shelton, and the rest. If *Zap Comics* could run *Captain Piss-gums and His Pervert Pirates*, we could run *Stephanus*.

So we did, and a day later the college president had the whole lot of us in on the carpet. Our academic careers hung in the balance. Fortunately no one took a bold stand for freedom in the arts just then.

No further instalments appeared. Somehow the artist must have known what was happening, because he didn't submit any more. He did leave a note, though, asking that his originals be left in a specific locker in Bartley Hall. He provided a lock, opened, to which he presumably had a key. Nobody even suggested staking the place out to find out who he was. We all had a sense of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know.

That might have been the end of that, but a week later I was in the remotest recesses of the periodical stacks of the college library, the part you can only reach through a door behind an enclosure on the first floor. The place has little cubbyhole desks, but the light is dim and no one ever studies there.

I chanced to peek over the top of one of these cubbyholes and saw an open page of a sketchbook. Then a pale face looked up at me, startled. The sketchbook

slammed shut. The owner started sweeping pens, rulers, books, into a bag with frantic haste. He stood up, and I recognized him immediately, of course, from his drawing. The name on the notebook read STEPHEN TAYLOR in block letters.

The only thing that surprised me was how tiny he was. I was already six-four and pretty big then, but I do not exaggerate by weighing in Stephen at little more than a third my size, maybe five-six and a hundred pounds. He could have passed for an eighth-grader. When he stood hunched-down, he looked even smaller.

He clutched his sketchbook to himself protectively, giving me that same wide-eyed, frightened stare he'd drawn so expressively.

"Uh, if I'm in your way... I'll just go somewhere else."

I was blocking his escape.

"Please... don't hurt me," he said.

That startled me. I put down the big periodical volume I was carrying and pulled up a chair and sat, now deliberately hemming him in. I indicated that he should sit back down. He pushed his chair as far away from me as he could in the tiny enclosure and faced me, sketchbook and bag in his lap.

"Nobody's going to hurt you," I said gently. I told him that I was Ben Schwartz and, despite everything, still art editor of *The Villanova*. "I just wanted to see what you were doing."

He glared at me sullenly.

"Your work is... unique. I think you're a genius."

He was still looking for a chance to bolt. It didn't take any particular insight for me to recognize that this kid wasn't, ah, "normal." I did my best to put him at his ease. I told him I was a history major. The last thing I wanted to do was tell him I was in psych. People always assume that you're going to analyze them for a class project. That, I was certain, Stephen Taylor would not stand for.

I tried to make small talk.

"I'm a junior. You must be a freshman. Aren't you?"

He shrugged.

"Well, how do you like Villanova?"

Another shrug. "Okay, I guess."

"Steve – your friends do call you Steve, don't they?"

He seemed completely flabbergasted. He groped in the air and pointed to himself and said, "But... I don't have any friends."

"Oh, come on now. You've been on campus almost three months now."

"I don't know anybody."

"Well then maybe you should meet a few people. Why don't you come over to the Pie Shoppe and we'll have a hoagie and I'll introduce you to the newspaper crowd?"

I pushed my chair back and made to leave. He stood up, still defensive, but when I turned to go, he followed me out of the library and across the campus. The Pie Shoppe was a cafeteria in the same building as the newspaper office, directly below us in fact. It turned out he didn't even know where it was. He didn't go into public places much.

"People don't like having me around."

"Why do you say that?"

"I scare them."

He wouldn't go in. I ended up sitting on a wall outside, sharing half a hoagie with him. He loosened up a

little. He at least pretended to confide things.

"You see that brick over there," he said, pointing. "That one, down at the corner. That used to be the only thing in the universe I wasn't afraid of. But lately I've come to understand that it is a particularly malevolent brick, worse than all the others."

Now that was interesting. Some self-consciousness about his own neuroses, and even a shyly expressed sense of humour about them.

He still didn't show me the contents of the sketchbook, not on that day or on several others. We took to meeting on that wall, then in remote recesses of the library when the weather turned cold.

I saw him almost daily. We talked. I lent him books, a lot of them science fiction. I tried to interest him in different things. I may be the only person in the history of the universe to draw Stephen Taylor into a political argument, which must be *something* of an accomplishment.

In time he did start to show me more of his work, sketches, studies, even a long *Stephanus* sequence he was continuing to work on without any hope of publication.

I asked him a few naïve questions about why he did what he did, and he rolled his eyes and said, "I paint what I see."

I felt slightly guilty that I was encouraging him, in a way, because it was clear that he was *driven* to create this material, that he didn't enjoy it, that he wasn't after recognition. It was a kind of slavery, depriving him of all social contact other than our meetings. His grades were apparently excellent, but otherwise, when he wasn't studying, he spent *all* his time wallowing in this imaginary Hell.

I once asked him about his home life. His father was dead, he told me. He wouldn't say *anything* about his mother. He clammed up and wouldn't talk to me for days afterward.

I admit I was *very* tempted to write him up as some sort of school project for Abnormal Psychology or something, but I suppose some lingering shred of decency prevented me.

Or the fascination. Here was a private window into the mind of the damned. He produced page after page of revolting, fantastic imagery. There seemed no end to it. But I couldn't tear myself away any more than he could.

Then the bombshells hit. Everything he drew was *true*, he told me. Chorazin, the Republic of Pain, was a real place. His father had been ruler there.

"I've never told anybody else about this," he said. "Please keep it a secret between us. But my Dad was Tetrarchon of Chorazin, before he got out and brought me to America when I was a baby. I guess you could say we're refugees."

"Tet-tetra -?"

"It means one ruler out of four."

"Who are the other three?"

He shut his sketchbook, closed his eyes, and seemed to be reciting from a long-rehearsed catechism. "Three are the Companions of the Tetrarchon, always walking at his side, his Fear, his Pain, and his Death. Only the Severus knows the true nature and true name of each of them and when each of them shall be made manifest."

"The who?" Surely this was more of the elaborate *Stephanus* mythos. I was appalled, but intrigued and admittedly not at all surprised, that he had apparently lost the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

"Here," he said. "Look at this."

He got something out of his pocket and handed it to me. I thought it was an arcade token at first, a coin about the size of a half-dollar, bronze-coloured, but light as aluminium. On one side was a profiled face, stern and wise, crowned with laurel leaves like a Roman caesar, but wearing an incongruous bow-tie. The inscription read: DN BERNARDUS T CHOR.

I looked up at Stephen, questioning.

He took the coin and traced the lettering with his finger. "Dominus Noster – Our Lord – Bernardus, Tetrarchon of Chorazin. That's my Dad."

He gave the coin to me once more, showing the reverse figure, which could have been a robot seen from the shoulders up, jut-jawed and hatchet-faced, with fierce, glaring eye, one hand holding an upraised rod that might have been a stylized whip. Like the rat king in the comic strip, this one had a crown of thorns growing out of its head. The inscription read: SEVERUS AET. Eternal Severus.

I gave the coin back to him again, uncertain of what to say.

"The name means the Severe One. He punishes everyone for their sins, even the Tetrarchon, whose very existence is a sin, but necessary, a glory and a duty and a disgrace..." He seemed to be reciting again. "... without end. But my Dad thought he could get away."

Suddenly I realized that Stephen was crying. He squeezed the coin so hard his knuckles went white. He just sat still in the silence of the shadowy library, rocking back and forth, leaning over a desk, sobbing softly.

I put my hand on his shoulder gently.

He jumped as if he'd been stung.

"Don't! I don't like to be touched. It hurts."

Indeed, in his comic strips, no one ever touched anyone except to inflict pain.

I waited for him to calm down. "Maybe we should talk about something else for a while."

"No. No." He tapped the coin on the desktop furiously, *rat-tat-tat*. "No, I've got to tell you. Now. It's too late for anything else. You already know too much. There's no turning back now, for either of us."

I felt a certain chill deep inside when he said that. But I didn't question him, or interrupt.

"You see," he continued, "my Dad *wasn't* as clever as he thought he was. The Severus came for him when I was six years old. I heard it all from my bedroom, the floorboards almost ready to break from the heavy footsteps of the Severus, the iron fist pounding on my parents' bedroom door, the voice like thunder mixed with a steam-engine hissing, demanding that the Lord Tetrarchon Bernardus appear. And my father came to the door and said to him, 'I am here and I am alone. I have no son.' Father went away then. My mother screamed for days and days... and I never saw my Dad again. For the longest time I didn't understand why he'd said '*I am alone. I have no son.*' Then I did understand, and my greatest fear was that he hadn't been *believed*."

Never mind the fascination. This had to stop. It was ruining his whole life.

"Steve. Don't. Don't say anything more."

"No... I've got to finish now. That wasn't the last of it. You see, every year on my birthday a package came for me in the mail, with stamps on it from Chorazin, addressed to NOBLISSIMUS STEPHANUS; and inside was a piece of my father, a finger, an ear, his nose... anything which could be amputated without killing him. God, do you have any idea what it's like to get your father's dick in the mail? Then, when I was 15, the box was larger, and where the others had been addressed to Noblissimus Stephanus – Most Noble Child – this one said DOMINUS NOSTER and TETRARCHON, because the box contained my father's head and I had inherited his titles. I think it was all just to remind me not to run away when my own time came."

When he had finished, I sat in silence, utterly devastated. He believed every word of this. It was tearing him up. I couldn't understand him at all. He was more a stranger now than when I'd first met him. Why had he created this endless, masochistic daydream for himself? And what was the meaning of his sole attempt to publish? A cry for help? Or was it an attempt at affirmation, to make it real?

It was all so transparently fake. The coin, well, he could have had it made up somewhere. As for the rest: I'd read Lovecraft. I knew where the "I paint what I see" line came from. And in M. R. James's "Count Magnus" the Satanist title character takes the "black pilgrimage" to unholy Chorazin, which is a place cursed by Jesus in the Bible for impenitence. Severus was the name of a whole gaggle of Roman emperors. The rest was... for lack of a better term... comic-book stuff. Anybody could invent a term like "tetrarchon." For all I knew, it wasn't even grammatical Greek.

"Stephen," I said at last, as gently as I could, carefully weighing each word. "Don't you think your life would be... happier... if you explained all this to a doctor?"

I have never seen such a look of hurt and hatred as came over his face in that instant. Our friendship was dead, I was sure. He felt I had betrayed him, more vilely than could be put into words, drawing all his secrets out of him just to ridicule his pain.

In an incredibly frigid tone he said, "You think I'm insane, don't you Ben?"

I could only sigh. Now I was the one who was weeping, out of sheer frustration. I was at the end of my resources. "Frankly, yes," I said at last.

"Then goodbye."

He packed up his things and left. I guess he must have quit school, because I didn't see him again for 20 years.

In the autumn of 1993 a small parcel arrived at my office, addressed very carefully by hand in block letters: DR. BENJAMIN C. SCHWARTZ, Ph.D., DEPT. OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT IRVINE, etc. I knew the handwriting at once, of course. How ironic, I thought, that the one initial lie I'd told to win Stephen's confidence had turned out true. Shortly after he left I switched my major to history, and here I was, a professor. Probably he'd followed my career with even greater diligence than I'd followed his.

Of course his entire *Stephanus of Chorazin* sequence was eventually published to considerable controversy and critical acclaim, and has achieved a place on that

small shelf of "serious" graphic-story work, somewhere between Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Eli Needleman's *The Hell Book*.

And now, for some reason, he'd chosen to contact me.

I opened the parcel with no little trepidation and found inside the coin of Bernardus of Chorazin, plus a round-trip plane ticket flying me first class to Philadelphia the following weekend, and a simple note:

Ben,

We have much to talk about still. Come at once. I need you.

Your friend,

Steve

Somehow – at least I imagined – he knew my wife was off with her mother to London for two weeks, and that the semester break was about to start. I could come.

It was an awesomely powerful temptation. Every memory of Stephen came flooding back, as if I'd last seen him in the university library only yesterday. I guess I was more obsessed than I'd realized.

After considerable thought, I decided I to go.

I spent the flight leafing through my copies of his books. (Should I be silly enough to ask him to autograph them? Was that being silly?) I rehearsed in my mind what I was going to say to him, what approach I'd take, for all I didn't know anything about his life in the intervening two decades save that he must be at least minimally functional, having managed to stay out of jail and the nut house, and in the good graces of his publishers. But beyond that, I drew a blank.

The taxi let me off in front of his house, a tasteful, small pseudo-Tudor on a back street in Wynnewood, no more than five miles from the Villanova campus. I rang the bell and the door opened, but he was behind it, so I didn't see him until I was inside and he'd closed the door.

What a pair. Here I was, 300 pounds, nearly bald, grey goatee, wheezing from the effort of carrying my suitcase from the cab. He must have been at least 37, but he still looked like a little kid, the same dark bangs down almost over his eyes, the same lost-boy look. He might have grown an inch, and there was a little grey and a trace of facial hair, but this was still the Stephen Taylor I'd known in the 1970s. It was as if no time had passed at all, and relationship resumed precisely where it had left off. He looked as frail and scared as ever.

"Why don't you let me take that?" He reached out and took my suitcase, then almost flopped over it as he dropped it to the floor from the unexpected weight. He merely walked away from it and led me into the kitchen, where he went through the nervous motions of courtesy. Indeed, the airline food had hardly satisfied me and his offer of orange juice, bagels, and liverwurst was entirely welcome.

He sat quietly while I ate. I tried to read his face then. He remained, as ever, a mystery. I wasn't even sure he was glad to see me. I hoped that all was forgiven and we were friends again. I hadn't just pitied him, 20 years ago. There had been something in him I valued, even admired.

But there was no warmth in his manner. He sat still and seemed to be listening for something. A clock ticked in some other room. The house creaked. Outside, a horn blared, stuck, then shut off suddenly.

"You got my package."

"Of course," I said.

He laid out a bag of chocolate chip cookies, taking none for himself.

"Then you know why I've asked you to come here."

"No," I said with my mouth full. "No, actually I don't." I swallowed some orange juice and rested the glass on the table. He went to the refrigerator and got me a refill.

"It's all the same, Ben, after all this time. Nothing has changed. Chorazin, the Tetrarchonate, everything."

"I thought you were done with that series. Steve, I've got all your books. It sounds unlikely, but I'm one of your biggest fans."

"Why unlikely?" For a moment I thought – with a flash of relief – that he was joking. Vanity in Stephen Taylor would have made him more human. But he didn't even seem to expect an answer. He was listening again, for something. The side of his face twitched. He'd developed a nervous tic since the last time I'd seen him.

"Steve, I can't lie to you. You're crazy. This is some kind of delusion. I don't know if you've ever been to a psychiatrist or not, but if not I'll have to be the one to break it to you that your entire life has been suffocated by a particularly hideous fantasy."

I paused. I was afraid he'd be angry. But he spoke emotionlessly.

"Produce the coin."

He didn't have to ask if I'd brought it with me. I produced it.

"That's real, isn't it?"

"And so's a scrap of metal somebody says is from a flying saucer. I don't know where it came from. But, Steve, look, I'm your friend, and that's why I have to convince you, finally, that you *made all this up*. It's a brilliant act of creation, but that's what it is, an *act*. Something you *did*. God alone knows why. If you'd imagined yourself to be Tarzan or James Bond, I could understand, but this isn't escapism. It's the opposite. You've built your own Bastille and condemned yourself to life imprisonment. What I want to do, as your friend, is set you free."

For several seconds, he made no response. The house was silent. Then he said, "What makes you think *I* started it, and not my father before me, and his father, and his, unto the umpteenth generation?"

"Oh, come on –"

"Ah-ah –" He raised his hand for silence, then held up the coin in both hands, quite intentionally, I suspect, like a Communion Host. He stared at it for a long time, then spoke again, without looking up. "Let us not argue, but instead deal with the matter immediately at hand, which is why I summoned you here."

"Yes," I said. "Why did you?"

"Would you really... set me free?"

I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to get drawn into the fantasy again.

"I think you would," he went on in the same, dead monotone, "because you truly are my friend. But I'm not entirely sure what you *can* do against the Severus. I just hope you can think of something. You see, it is time for me to assume my duties, as Tetrarchon of Chorazin. I've been given notice. He is coming for me tonight."

When dealing with a madman, never argue his delusion directly. Wheedle around it. "Uh, Steve, there is an inconsistency here, which I'd like you to explain."

"What's that, Ben?"

"Hadn't the... ah... throne of Chorazin been vacant for quite a lot of years? So why is the Severus coming for you *tonight*?"

"Time moves differently in Chorazin, not exactly faster or slower even, just different. Like in Faerie." He folded his hands on the table top, still fingering the coin, and smirked very slightly. "I have an answer for everything, don't I?"

Before I could reply, something crashed like a load of bricks dropped on the floor. The house shook. Plaster trickled down onto the table. Then came a second crash, and a third.

"What the –?"

He looked me straight in the face. He seemed utterly terrified, helpless, pleading without words. With some effort he whispered, "Will you try to set me free? This is your chance."

"What do you suggest I do?"

Again the house shook. Furniture toppled upstairs. Floorboards creaked, broke. Then whatever it was up there paused, and I could make out ticking and whirring sounds, like mechanical parts working furiously.

"Ben –"

"What?"

He slid the coin across the tabletop. "This might help."

I took it and, inexplicably even to myself, rose from the table with some idea of what I had to do. I walked out of the kitchen, turning back once to see Stephen huddled at the table, his eyes shut tight, his fists over his ears, trembling and sobbing, muttering, "Go, go, go..."

I ascended the front stairs. I told myself that I was going upstairs to find that Stephen had rigged a series of weights to drop in sequence, and I was going to come down again and tell him to end all this nonsense and get some professional help. This time, I was sure, he'd co-operate.

But no. There on the landing stood a maniacal version of the Tin Woodsman of Oz, a giant in tarnished silver armour, his wrathful face of living, molten gold. By the sharpness of his features, by the fury of his eye, by the crown of thorns I knew him.

The Severus spoke, its voice more profoundly terrifying than words can describe. "*I seek Our Lord Tetrarchon Stephanus.*"

What happened next remains, like all that followed after, incomprehensible. I didn't run screaming into the night, which would have been a sensible reaction. I'd like to think that I heroically sacrificed myself for my friend, to set him free... But, no. I wasn't really sure he even *was* my friend. Some overwhelming inner compulsion drove me to *deny*, to sound to the utmost depths the mystery I now confronted. I had to go on *disbelieving*, since the alternative was to accept that Stephen Taylor was some kind of god, who could create whole worlds with the stroke of a pen.

Such are the lunatic lengths we go to in order to preserve intellectual self-esteem.

A matter of survival. It was him or me. One of us was going to turn out to be crazy.

The only solution was to dare the Severus to do his worst, that his secrets might be revealed.

I held up the coin and said, "I am the son of Our Lord

Bernardus, Tetrarchon of Chorazin before me. Here is his image."

The Severus seized me in a burning, crushing grip. One living iron hand covered my eyes, searing my face. And my sin was the sin of pride.

The city of Chorazin lies in the delta of the River Bile, between the Sea of Blood and the Desert of Shit. There pain is the industry, product, currency, and sole amusement of the inhabitants. There I ruled as Tetrarchon, prisoner and lord, for 13 years and 13 days, carried in a litter on the backs of legless giants, whose lower parts were black machines with squealing, sparking caterpillar treads. I dwelt in the dark palace rimmed in fire. I heard the endless screams from its lofts and great galleries, and watched in solemn state as my winged Praetorians soared high aloft with some victim in their grasp until all were lost in the swirling smoke that forever filled the sky of Chorazin. The victim came plummeting down, to be dashed into a red smear on the elaborate mosaics of the courtyard built for this very purpose.

And from the blood and scattered teeth and bits of bone, the sages of Chorazin divined the will of the Tetrarchon and carried out his will, and recorded the number of his sins.

It didn't matter if I resisted or played along. My every action was a portent, a sign. By the raising of my hand or the turning of my head, even as I tried to avert my gaze, even as I closed my eyes; by all these things, countless thousands suffered unspeakably, as the will of the Tetrarchon was known and interpreted by the sages.

Both human and rat-faced citizens swarmed through the streets in their ramshackle automobiles – like washing machines on wheels, I decided – crashing together, bursting into flame, the onlookers swarming over the still burning wreckage to gorge themselves on half-cooked meat.

The heads on the spikes above the doorways spoke to me, babbling their woes, accusing me, calling me by the names of Tetrarchs past, for in Chorazin, where time is not as it is in any familiar country, and past and present are the same. I was one with Our Lord Bernardus and with many, many others before him; pain's eternal avatar.

It was all so pathetically absurd, no alternate universe with its own, self-consistent logic, but a demented child's fantasy, a jumble of cartoon anachronisms.

Yes, I presided as they tortured the duck on the wheel, breaking his limbs with sledgehammers.

And at the end of 13 years and 13 days, the Severus came to me and said, "*Thou, too, art a sinner,*" and he stripped me of my robes of state and of my diadem and bore me off to be punished with the rest.

I cannot even catalog it all: the floggings that went on for days, slowly; electro-shock that caused such spasms it broke bones; injections of acids, faeces, of strange drugs that brought screaming golden mouths out of the air to devour my flesh while I dangled in some dank cell, nailed to an overhead beam with a spike. Even that was only a prologue, as the torturers of Chorazin worked on me lovingly, creating new and exquisite torments for my sake.

The torturers wore black hoods, as I thought they would, but they were hardly the burly, bare-chested fel-

lows of the medieval stereotype. Men, women, and rats all wore blue overalls, with yellow patches of the Severus on their shoulders; and they came and went and laboured and yawned and gossiped and broke for lunch and punched time-cards like an endless, anonymous stream of technicians in the great factory of my own, unique agony.

For the pain was very, very real. That much, inevitably, always, remained consistent.

The sound of the city, the breath and anthem of Chorazin, was screaming. It never stopped.

I screamed too, and at times I didn't even know I was screaming. It sounded like someone else, far away. At times I seemed to transcend my own pain, rising before the indescribable Neo-Platonic One, which may only be glimpsed when one has put off the flesh, or had it torn from one's body bit by bit.

In the end, I think, I yearned desperately to rise, to transcend, to put off, but I was nailed firmly in place, crucified among so many others in the great forum of Chorazin, while a brass band blared, traffic swarmed and honked and crashed, and rats gathered at my feet to drink. The man crucified behind me – I couldn't turn my head to see him – began to recite: "*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! For if in Tyre and Sidon had been worked the miracles that have been worked for you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*"

So many, many miracles, to no purpose, for no one was redeemed.

I could only reply: "*Which way I fly is Hell; I myself am Hell.*"

The cartoon caricature of the world's pain, with erudite dialogue balloons.

In the end, too, I did not actually die. The hooded, jump-suited minions of the Severus took me down and laid me out to be healed, not in a hospital, but in a kind of morgue. I rested for a long time in a metal drawer, dreaming in the darkness, imagining that my body was a cloth dummy, a sack stuffed with sand, and the sand, which was both my pain and my life, trickled out through countless rips and tears, rattling down through the drawers below me. In my dreams I tried to figure out why I had been rejected, and felt weirdly disappointed that I had been found unworthy.

The drawer opened. Hands lifted me up.

"Thou art not the true Stephanus," the Severus boomed. *"Therefore be cast out. Return unto him as a sign of our summoning and our wrath."*

I felt myself heaved through the air, falling from darkness into light. I braced myself against the impact that never came. Naked, so light-headed I seemed to float, my skeletal limbs fumbling every-which-way, I staggered down the front stairs of Stephen Taylor's house.

I was the hero of Joseph Campbell's mono-myth, returned from Faerie... the gift and burden of wisdom –

Down, into the kitchen, as if no time at all had passed, to confront the greatest liar of them all, whose lies could create universes because he truly believed them.

It was time for a bit of scepticism.

"Stephen!" I shouted. "You're fucking insane. There's nothing up there. It's all a delusion. Show's over. You're free."

Such were the ravings of a palpable fraud. But

Stephen wasn't listening. When I got into the kitchen, I found my plane tickets. My luggage was still in the living room by the door where he'd been unable to lift it.

Stephen Taylor was gone. He didn't even leave a thank-you note.

Christ, what a ridiculous ending.

Back in California, it was hard to re-establish my identity, for I was so changed, greatly aged, half my former weight, and I'd only been gone – as it turned out – 13 weeks. You're looking for some significance in that number. Go ahead. I can't find it.

My wife wouldn't look into my face. I couldn't even attempt to explain, and I could never, never undress in front of her, revealing the terrible scars that covered my body. But she could see the marks on my wrists, and where the hand of the Severus had seared my face. I can't blame her that she left with the kids and told them their father was dead. When confronted with the inexplicable, we can only tell lies.

And what is truth? said jesting Pilate.

You got me. Ask Steve. Maybe he can help you.

At the university, my colleagues kept taking me aside with horrified sympathy and asking – not really wanting an answer – if there was anything they could do. The Department Head offered me indefinite leave with pay, more than once. Like everyone else, he explained the weight-loss as the onset of AIDS and was wondering why I took so long to die.

But no, I had only my work, or else I'd be alone and helpless with the mysteries.

Christ, the ending –

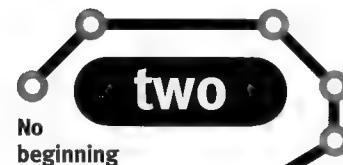
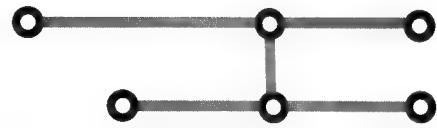
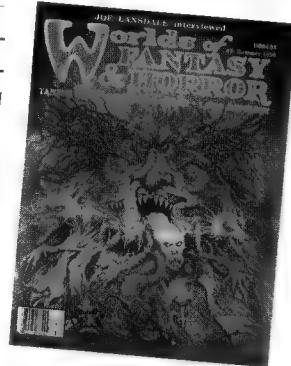
Reclusive artist Stephen Taylor, dead of a heart attack at 40. I read your obituary in the *New York Times*. So our friendship, if that's what it ever was, begins and ends with newspapers. At least you had a couple good years, Stephen. I understand you even married. And your last work, the *Prison Etchings*, were Fine Art, rivalling Piranesi. There is something serene, almost sublime in those endless, twisting stairways and corridors of prisons where only shadows and dust remain, from which both jailors and prisoners have long since departed.

Stephen, I'd like to believe that you set me up, that *everything*, from that envelope at the door of the college newspaper office to your seemingly premature death, was meticulously calculated, part of an infinitely ingenious jailbreak.

If you made it, maybe something makes sense.

Stephen, I am writing this for you, to be published or to be burned, to make it true or to expose it as one last ridiculous fantasy. I'm not sure which.

Darrell Schweizer lives in Pennsylvania, where he edits *Worlds of Fantasy and Horror* (previously *Weird Tales*). His previous stories for *Interzone* were "On the Last Night of the Festival of the Dead" (issue 90), "The Giant Vorviades" (issue 99), "King Father Stone" (issue 103) and, with Jason Van Hollander, "The Crystal-Man" (issue 111).



No beginning
The novel for
the internet
about London
Underground by

Geoff Ryman

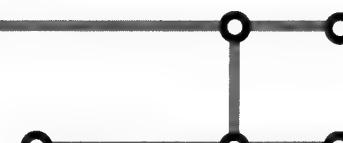
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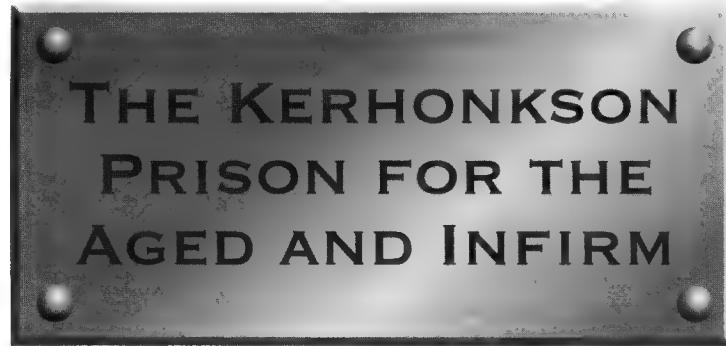
No middle



But there is
an end



Nights in the Gardens of



Thomas M. Disch

"Chester, how's it going, my man. How's the leg?" Chester looked down at his legs, as though wondering which of them the question referred to. Before he could come up with an answer, the man in the gray pyjamas had settled down beside him on the bench and become an old friend, praising the weather: "We got some sunlight for a change!" blaming the food: "Meatloaf? You call that meatloaf, then I'm Elvis!" and finally, a dealer finally unveiling his best wares: "Did you hear about Cooper?"

"Who?"

"Cooper. He checked out. Last night, in the middle of *Death Dreams*. We'll never know if Christopher Reeve was the murderer or somebody else, 'cause they cleared the TV room like it was a fire drill. Cooper was stretched out on the floor and the new nurse with the big earrings was zapping his chest with that phaser of hers, but he was gone. Down the toilet. After how long, do you think? Take a guess. Fifty-six years. He went into the joint the day before Pearl Harbor. Assault with intent."

"I don't think I knew him," Chester said. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't, but even when they're dead you don't discuss what someone gets sent up for. And they return the compliment.

"You knew him all right. Little bald weasel, with the bifocals. Scabs on his hands, you didn't know what it was, but you would never want to shake him by the hand. And he only talked about baseball. *Ancient* baseball. Had all the stats in his head, until they started leaking away. Alzheimer's."

Chester nodded gravely. He had the same thing. It wasn't as bad as it could get eventually. The worst so far had been when he couldn't play cards, because the part of the brain that does the figuring just wouldn't light up.

"He put away three guys," the volunteer anchorman went on, "while he was in the joint. He even went after some old goat here. That would of been a first for Kerhonkson. We've had guys break out... and get as far as the train station." He paused, Mr Stand-up Comedy, waiting for a laugh. When the laugh didn't come, he rolled right along. "But a genuine homicide? Not yet. Think of all this talent going to waste."

Chester said nothing. He was beginning to cop a resentment. He hadn't invited this windbag to share his bench and start a goddamn memorial service. Chester

had come here for some peace and quiet, for the sun, and the reservoir. You could not see the reservoir directly, but at certain times of day, in the right weather, the mist rose up off the water and blanked out the hills on the far side. Chester liked watching things disappear. At twilight, when other people on the yard were watching the sunset, and afterwards, he liked to stand at the perimeter fence looking east.

"I read once that any lifer who's killed two and a half other cons while he's in the joint has saved the state the cost of his own incarceration. I couldn't figure out the arithmetic on that. You'd think one would be enough. You got one, you subtract one from it, the result's got to be zero, right? Anyhow, if that's a true statistic, then Cooper had earned his board and room with half a life to spare."

The guy gave him this *hungry* look and out of the blue Chester remembered his name. Decker.

"You want one of my pills, Decker?" Chester said at last, in a tone of peeved surrender. "If that's what you want, just say so."

"Well... if you don't need them for that leg of yours... yeah. See, I get these headaches, but that nurse, she's some kind of sadist, she won't let me have a fucking aspirin. If I knew anywhere else to get them..."

Chester felt around inside the big pocket of his terrycloth robe, trying to decide by touch which was the Kleenex for wiping his nose and which was the one the capsule was wrapped in. "Here," he said, producing the right Kleenex the first time. "But remember. It's time-release. It kicks in about four hours after you take it. Longer, if you've just eaten. So if you take it too late in the day, it'll just be a sleeping pill."

"Thanks, pal. I won't forget this."

"I will," said Chester, but not until the guy had left him alone. He smiled at his little joke, and then, with the illegal nail-file that he kept wedged in a crack on the underside of the wooden bench, he made another notch in the neatly spaced series on the topside of the slat.

When he'd finished with the nail-file, he counted his notches. Twelve. The twelfth was for Cooper. He returned the file to its hiding place. Tomorrow would be time enough to make notch 13. Chester did not count his chickens before they were hatched.

"You never have the nights out here, do you?"

remarked Mrs Schultz.

"No ma'am," said Chester. "We're always locked down before it turns dark. They let us out on the yard sometimes, but never into the gardens."

"I think I would miss that most of all."

"It's surprising the things you do miss, and what you can get used to. There's no predicting."

"Did you miss killing people?"

Chester would have resented the question coming from anyone else, but since Mrs Schultz was in the same deep shit as he was, and since she seemed genuinely curious and not just trying to probe his conscience or find out if he had one, he answered honestly. "That's probably what I missed most of all. Of course, since I did most of the killings at night, and out of doors somewhere, it comes out the same as what you were saying. It's nice being out here when it's really dark like this, and mist in the air."

"Did you follow them?"

"No, it was more like I waited for them to come to me. But I like those parts in the movies – the women on the streets, the sound of their high heels, and then the other footsteps. In real life it wasn't like that."

They were both silent for a while. On the other side of the scrim of pines you could hear a semi gearing down to climb the hill. At least that's what Chester imagined the sound to be. Then there was a muffled tap, which he couldn't figure until he realized it must be his own cane. Sure enough, it was gone from where he'd hooked it over the back of the bench.

"When you dream," Mrs Schultz asked, "do your dreams take place in prison?"

"Sometimes. But not as often as you'd suppose, seeing how much of my life I've been locked up. And yourself?"

"Me?" She segued into a self-deprecating laugh. "Oh, I'm not *here* so often that it's taken root that deeply. Two hours a week with the library cart. Or do you mean: do I dream of what we've been doing? I don't. It's surprised me how little toll our murders have taken, spiritually."

"Yeah, I always figured serial killers probably sleep easier than most people. They can take care of all those nightmare things while they're awake."

"I suppose I *must* account myself a serial killer now."

"Fourteen's a pretty good score, ma'am."

"Fourteen?" she objected. Then it dawned. "Oh – with you."

"You weren't going to count me? Wasn't that why they gave me that so-called sedative before the guard brought us out here? I'm not dumb. Not that dumb anyhow."

"I know that, Chester. I've always respected your intelligence. I think you're quite the brightest of all of the men here."

"That's faint praise, Mrs Schultz. Faint praise. Anyhow, here we are. If privacy was what you were after, we got privacy. We kiss in the shadows."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That was a popular song, back when. I remember I would sing along with the car radio. 'We kiss in the shadows.' I forget the rest of it."

She filled in the blank. "Our meetings are secret."

"That's right. So it's even the appropriate song for the occasion. Did you ever have sex outside, Mrs Schultz? Somewhere like this. Or was it always in the bedroom?"

She ignored his question by asking her own: "Did you

keep score? Was that part of it?"

"You mean, before I got sent up? Sure. Not written down, that would have been stupid. There was never so many that it was hard to keep track of them all. The fingers on two hands did the job."

"And when you think of... your score, do you include the men here? Or are they somehow separate?"

"Well, the two sexes are very different. But yeah, sometimes I add them all together. The grand total's 20: 13 here, and the seven women."

"I thought there were only four."

"Four they prosecuted. The other three they suspected, but they couldn't prove anything."

"And you wouldn't confess?"

"Why make it any easier for them?"

"Didn't the victims have families?"

"Some of them must have, I suppose."

"Weren't they at the trial?"

"Maybe. All that part is a blank now."

"You really feel no remorse?"

"Do you? For the guys here?"

"Actually, I feel a kind of grim satisfaction."

"I know the feeling. So, tell me – do you plan to keep adding to your score? Find another helper?"

"No, that would be too risky now. In any case, the warden has given me my walking papers. There won't be any more library service at Kerhonkson."

"It's not as though there was ever much call for it, Mrs Schultz. The guys that aren't going blind are zombies or else they couldn't read to begin with. You won't be missed all that much."

"That was always one of the satisfactions of coming here every week. To see just how brutish you all were. Brutish but feeble. A swamp full of geriatric alligators. Just what they deserve, I could tell myself. Crueller than any lethal injection."

Another silence. Mrs Schultz tapped the bench arhythmically with the side of his aluminium cane.

"So, tell me, Mrs Schultz. What got you interested in the sport of shooting alligators?"

"Compassion, actually. Or that's what I thought it was. I'm a Quaker, you know."

"No shit? Now that's a surprise. You don't seem the type. A retired go-go dancer possibly, but not a Quaker."

"My second husband was a Friend, and a crusader against the death penalty. I... joined his crusade. I attended candlelight vigils in other states when there was an execution. I handed out leaflets. I spoke at town meetings. What I would tell people, then, was that the death penalty made us *all* murderers. Each one of us was no better than an executioner. To which a good many of them said fine, they wouldn't mind doing the job. When it came their turn, they'd explain why they were in favour of the death penalty. How their husband or wives or children had been killed. Sometimes by criminals who'd been released on parole. Your name was brought up once or twice at those debates, as I recall. That was some 20 years after you'd been put away, but people still remembered you."

"There were a couple books, that's probably why. There's worse than me."

"I know, I've done the research. And quite a few are right here at Kerhonkson. New York did not have the

death penalty for all those years. So the prisons are saddled with you in perpetuity. In another ten years Kerhonkson will be the largest facility in the state. And the average annual cost of maintaining each toothless alligator in its own little cage is close to \$200,000."

"It's a scandal, I know. I can understand you taxpayers are outraged. But what you gonna do?"

Mrs Schultz laughed. And then sighed. "If only you hadn't been so impulsive, Chester, we might have accomplished so much more. Why did you have to give that pill to Mr Decker? It was not intended for him."

"He pissed me off. Anyhow, it killed him, didn't it? So that's another notch in our gun."

"Not at all. He had a minor stroke, after which he dictated a long and circumstantial account of how he had got the pill from you, and his suspicions that you'd 'assisted' Cooper and several others similarly. Fortunately, the legal aide who'd taken down his testimony went directly to the warden."

"And the warden finished the job on Decker himself?"

"A mischance befell. But not before Mr Decker had communicated his suspicions to others. So you see, Chester, you would be, in any case, a marked man. Not only among your fellow prisoners. There would have been an inquiry. You would be asked where you'd got the pills you'd given to your victims, who had been their Dr Kevorkian."

"I kind of figured that was the situation. You don't think they might not want to buy your silence, too? The same way they're buying mine? It wouldn't be that hard."

"I have friends, Chester, who share my convictions. They have tapes of my account of all my dealings with you – and with the warden, and the doctors here. I imagine that's as good an insurance policy as I'll need."

"So I'm going to be the one and only scapegoat."

"The wages of sin, Chester, is death. Does that seem unfair?"

"No, I figure I've had a good run. And it's been great working with you. You've put it all in a new light. I used to think the killing was about excitement. But it's not. Not necessarily. With you it's been like... I can't describe it. It's like being out here in the garden, at night. All soft and misty and, like you said, spiritual. I never was afraid of the dark. I've always liked it."

He stretched out his arm to try and touch her, but she'd left the bench.

"How long have I got till the stuff takes hold?"

"Less than an hour, at this point."

"If I could reach you..." he began regretfully.

"You'd try to kill me?"

"If I were younger, probably. Yeah."

"That's why I took away your cane."

"I figured. Well, you can't win 'em all." He smiled in a friendly way.

She couldn't see his smile, but she seemed to sense it, for there was a kind of choked-up tone in her voice when she said, "I'll leave you now, Chester." Like she was burying a pet.

Thomas M. Disch's previous stories in *Interzone* were "Canned Goods" (issue 9), "Hard Work" (issue 17), "Celebrity Love" (issue 35), "The Story of Faith" (issue 82) and "The Man Who Read a Book" (issue 87). His last novel was *The Priest* (1995).

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Probably the most important living British writer of serious fantasy bar Moorcock, Neil Gaiman first made his mark with his work in the comics field, most notably with his Sandman series, which won just about every award going, including the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story. Thanks to his recent BBC television series, *Neverwhere*, and its accompanying novel, Gaiman's profile has never been higher.

Let's start with Sandman, because you've finished that after nine years. Two thousand pages of story under your belt – how does it feel?

Very strange. It feels very.... done, in the best sort of sense. I don't wake up any more going, "Oh fuck, there's that *Sandman* story I should have told." In many ways it all seems very distant. Right now we're putting together the last of the graphic novels, *The Wake*, and it's been odd going back and reading it, you know, the last six episodes of *Sandman*. What's odd about it is that I've found myself laughing at some of the jokes and admiring some of the writing, because it almost seems like it was done by somebody else. Very much a case of, "That was then, but now it's time to move on."

You didn't experience any post-natal depression?

No, but I had a really rough last year-and-a-half on *Sandman*. Those last 18 issues, from the beginning of *The Kindly Ones* on, were very, very hard to write. In plot terms, it was the emotional equivalent of getting into a big lorry at the top of the hill, aiming the lorry at a huge wall at the bottom of the hill, and putting your foot down on the accelerator. You're heading for the wall, and you know you've built all sort of things into the script so that, if you wanted to, you could turn the wheel at the last minute and not hit the wall, but you also know that the whole point of what you're doing is that you're driving a big lorry into a wall, and that's what you've got to do. And then *The Wake* was the emotional equivalent of standing beside the burning wreck and saying, "Well, it was a great lorry, and just look at that wall!" That whole period was very weird for me. Bits of the writing of the comic would reflect in my life, stranding through it in an odd way.

There were tragedies in your life then, at that time?

Roger Zelazny's death particularly. The friendship between Roger and me was a strange one because it was a friendship that both of us kept postponing, in so far as there was always plenty of time and neither of us was in anything resembling a hurry. So we'd get together for an evening at a World Fantasy Con, we'd have a two-hour phone call, but it was always very postponed, on the basis that one day I would go down and stay with him in Santa Fe or he would come up and stay with me in Minneapolis, and then we could get it together. We were two people who liked each other enormously, and obviously I've been hugely influenced by him, particularly his pre-1972 works, and the last time we chatted was when my daughter had just been born and he had sent her a dream-catcher which I had put up over her bed, and all of a sudden he was gone and it was very, very painful.

Unlike this metaphorical lorry crash, you couldn't see it coming at all.

It was completely unexpected. He had had cancer for a year and he was keeping it a secret because he was terrified that if his publisher found out, they would take back his three-book advance. He'd sworn everyone close to him to silence. Which actually I think was the wrong thing to do. If I discovered I was dying, I would let everybody know so that they could say goodbye, because people need to say goodbye. It may not be important to you if you're dying but it's important to other people. And that was a lot of what *The Wake* ended up being about. Parts 2 and 3 of *The Wake* are about formal and informal ways of saying goodbye, and about having to say your goodbyes to

No More Worlds to Conquer

Neil Gaiman

interviewed by

James Lovegrove



Photo: Kelli Bickman

someone who's no longer there.

What about the final issue of Sandman, The Tempest? How did readers react to that?

I've never seen such a clear divide between the people who got it and the people who didn't; the people who realized that it was about endings and stories and the nature of stories, about where stories come from and how life transmutes into art and art transmutes into life, and the people who went, "What the fuck was that all about then?"

Do you think everyone was expecting a big, grand climax, and what you gave them was essentially a coda to a coda?

Anybody who was expecting a big climax to *Sandman* probably hadn't been reading the rest of the series. *Sandman* was never about climaxes. It was about foreplay and anticlimax. And yes, exactly: it was a coda to a coda, and as such was about infinite codas, endings extending into forever.

Do you have any upcoming comics projects? What about Sweeney Todd, the series you and Michael Zulli began for the horror anthology Taboo shortly before Taboo was cancelled?

We're trying to figure out ways to finish it, and they may not all be comics. They may well be partly prose, partly something else. I'd quite like to write a play for one chapter. Apart from that, I have nothing planned.

Of course, in your absence, your fans can always turn to those not very good Tekno comics with your name above the title...

Yes, I'm sorry about those. When I was asked to submit some character ideas to Tekno, I should have made sure that there was a clause in the contract allowing me approval on the stuff that went out with my name on it. I've learned a huge lesson from the Tekno thing. You wouldn't believe the number of projects I've said no to since, many of them with huge quantities of money attached – projects which would have been able to use my name and over which I would have had no control. One major computer company approached me with this computer game, and they had the plot and the characters all worked out already, and gradually I established that what they were going to pay me \$50,000 for was to be able to attach my name to a computer game which they'd already created and into which I would have no input whatsoever, so I said no.

I've no objection to writers making as much money as possible, but there must be a point at which you say to yourself, "Do I really need this?"

It's not to do with money and it's never to do with money. Well, OK,

Tekno was a little bit to do with money, in so far as the offer came the day after a letter arrived from my former accountant telling me that I had just received a surprise tax demand for a sum larger than my yearly income. When I got the call from Tekno asking me if I was interested in creating a few characters for them and offering me a figure roughly the same as what I owed the taxman, I said to myself, "You know, I think somebody's trying to tell me something," so I signed the contract and that was that.

Neverwhere, particularly the novel, is a kind of love-hymn to London, isn't it? But not the London most of us know, not the London of clogged streets and bad air and dogshit on the pavements.

No, although I want to do a book about that London some time. *Neverwhere* isn't even about the London that I discovered and fell in love with while we were location-scouting for the TV series, because that was another, wonderful London – the London of getting to walk the St Pancras Hotel and explore Down Street station and walk the sewers, which I loved. For that, they put us in all this protective clothing and gave us these giant Marigold gloves and things, and they told us, "Do not scratch your face, do not put your thumb in your mouth," and so on, and then we got into this Thames Water van and drove to Blackfriars Bridge and stopped, and they put up cones around the van, opened a manhole and ushered us down, and all of a sudden I was walking in the Fleet River. There's a story in the book *The Hidden Rivers of London* which I nearly used as an extra quotation at the beginning of *Neverwhere*, after the line from G. K. Chesterton, and it's about the time the men who work in the sewers found a brass bed down there, and they couldn't understand it, for in order for that bed to have been down there somebody would have had to disassemble it bit by bit and take it down into the sewers and reassemble it again. I love that. I think that's marvellous.

What about the myth-riddled, history-steeped London of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair and Alan Moore?

I think they're amazing writers, and that London fascinates me, too. In fact, I did a story for a comics anthology called *It's Dark in London*, edited by Oscar Zarate, which Serpent's Tail are putting out. The story's called "The Court," and Warren Pleece is drawing it, and it's all about the Earl's Court area. It's a weird, nasty little tale, and it contains meditations on the shape and existence of actual London. *Neverwhere*, though, isn't about actual London. *Neverwhere* is about the London that I

built in my head when I was nine or ten. My first encounter with London was through the Tube map and through *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and also through the Jerry Cornelius books. All those evocative place names, you know, Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill and Shepherds Bush, which have gradually become divorced from their origins and which conjure up images of places that are half wilderness — *Neverwhere* is about *that* London, an internal rather than external one. Part of the fun with *Neverwhere* was trying to put the magic back into those names. I would like it if somebody walking through Earl's Court, after reading or watching *Neverwhere*, were to look up at the name on the street sign on the wall and experience a little *frisson*.

The novel actually reminded me more of The Man Who Was Thursday than The Napoleon of Notting Hill – its furious pace, the subterranean tunnels beneath Leicester Square, all that.

The Man Who Was Thursday is one of my iconic books. It's never been made into a film, and I would love to make it into a film. Something I don't think I've ever seen remarked on about that book is that the landscape is completely internal. The weather in *The Man Who Was Thursday* makes no logical sense. One minute they're pursuing the Professor through the snow of London, the next minute they're taking off their coats in the sweltering heat of Paris and fighting the duel, and that doesn't make sense. You can only do that in dreams, and suddenly you realize that the book's subtitle, *A Nightmare*, is absolutely true. It is a nightmare, and the logic in it is dream logic.

To keep the Chesterton theme going, Richard Mayhew, the central character in Neverwhere, reminds me of the socially maladroit man in the Chesterton poem "whose gloves will not go on, whose compliments will not come off" – to begin with, at any rate. He's so paralysed by fear of everything, he lives a completely trammelled existence. He only becomes more real as a person by entering the fantasy world of London Below.

Neverwhere is about growing up, about somebody who gets to grow up a little as the story progresses. Richard is the man who learns something, learns better, discovers who he is. I named him after Henry Mayhew, who wrote *London Labour and the London Poor*, which is, again, one of my favourite books. Although it's ostensibly about poverty in Victorian London, you learn just as much about Mayhew himself through the answers people give to his questions, things like "No, sir, I haven't heard of Jesus." You can just picture him,

can't you, bending down and asking, "So tell me, my good man, have you heard of Jesus?"

The novel wasn't nearly as dark as I was expecting. The style seems to be more in the Terry Pratchett / Douglas Adams mould.

It was interesting. It was me versus the book. I knew the kind of texture and flavour I wanted for *Neverwhere*, something akin to Mark Helprin or John Crowley. I wanted to write something filled with coruscating, intense sentences, and I know I can write prose like that because I've written short stories like that, but I went through several false starts on the novel, rejecting each one because it was too fast and funny, and eventually as the deadline for delivery of the manuscript drew nearer and nearer, I realized that I didn't have any choice. I realized that the book was *meant* to be fast and funny. But I never went for the gag, which was the one thing I didn't like about doing *Good Omens* with Terry Pratchett. Writing that book with him was interesting, and I learned an awful lot, but I was very much the 'prentice, picking up things as I went along, while Terry was the master craftsman, spitting on his hands and saying, "No no no, lad, you don't want to do it that way. Look, watch how I do it." I was definitely the journeyman in that partnership, but having done *Good Omens* and the *Hitch-hiker's Guide* book, *Don't Panic*, I know my way around that kind of vocabulary, and there are an awful lot of places in *Neverwhere* where I could have done it in that style but I didn't want to because it wouldn't have been fair on the book. I'd like it to be funny because it's quirky rather than because it's full of gags.

Like Buster Keaton – it's funnier when it's played straight.

Right. Actually, I'm going back in now for the American draft and I'm going to have one of those quite probably vain attempts at injecting a little more substance and a little more strangeness into it. Which isn't to say that it's insubstantial as it is now, but the book sort of dictated that it be written in the tradition of, for want of a better phrase, light English writing. Richmal Crompton, P. G. Wodehouse, Chesterton, the pieces A. A. Milne wrote for *Punch*, that marvellous, witty tradition. But just because it's light writing doesn't mean it shouldn't and can't have substance.

The lightness works because it makes the serious bits – and there are plenty of them in Neverwhere – all the more effective. I'm thinking especially of the scene where Richard undergoes the "ordeal" at the hands of the Black Friars. That scene to me is the moral heart of the book, when the coin of

Richard's life is flipped and he experiences how it really feels to be homeless, the horror and degradation of it.

That was the first point at which I was really happy with the book, that chapter, because up until then you could regard the book as a kind of meringue, and that's the point at which you bite into it and find "Ah, oh, there's something wrong here – there's blood down my chin."

Did you find it hard to write about homelessness without being patronising or, worse, making it look appealing as an alternative lifestyle?

That was why *Neverwhere* was *Neverwhere*. I was a judge on the 1991 Arthur C. Clarke Awards, and Lenny Henry came up to me after the judges' meeting in the Groucho Club to say hi – we'd done the Comic Relief comic together – and he said, "I've got an idea for a fantasy series," and I said, "Great! What is it?" and he said, "Tribes of homeless people in London – could you do something with that?" And I thought about it, and I have three or four friends who've been homeless at one point or another, and I'd talked to them about it, and I wound up writing a long fax to Lenny saying, "Look, I don't want to do that because I could very easily make it look glamorous, especially if it's on telly. You'll get some girl in Liverpool running away from home because she 'knows' how cool life on the streets is in London. So let's do it as metaphor. Let's stick it 'through the wardrobe,' because that way we can distance it."

So fantasy was the right vehicle for tackling the issue?

I wouldn't want to do a 'cool homeless people' story because being homeless isn't cool. It's horrible. You die. If you don't get off the streets, mostly you die. I remember chatting to a girl once who had been on the streets, I remember looking at all these beautiful pink scars on her wrists where she'd completely failed to commit suicide at one point or other, and I remember her saying – this was in September – that she hoped it wasn't going to be a cold winter, because if it was she would be dead. The biographical sketch of Anaesthesia in the book is based on the experiences of someone else I know, the bit about walking the streets at night in winter because if you sleep while the sun's out there's a little bit more warmth. And this girl was a smart, university-educated, able, bright person who just happened to have been thrown out of the place where she was living and didn't have anywhere else to go, and she was broke and so she wound up surviving for a while by stealing bread and milk from people's doorsteps in the morning.

I've heard that you have a sequel to Neverwhere planned. Novel or script first?

I know what the next *Neverwhere* storyline I want to do is, and it'll probably be a script first, just because it's more efficient to do it that way, shape the story an episode at a time, build the framework first and then put the rest on top while writing the script, and finally add a whole extra layer while doing the novel. I've got the Seven Sisters living in my head at the moment – these seven women, from Olympia all the way down to Putney, who've not been on speaking terms for 30 years. It'll probably be closer to *I, Claudius* than anything! But at this point I don't know if I'm even going to do it. I don't know if the BBC will want a second series. It's quite probable another one will happen, and I'd love to follow some of the characters from the first series around some more. I'd love to write for some of those actors again.

And you may get a larger budget.

That's part of the problem. I wouldn't do it for a smaller budget. Every other TV company's attitude is, "Well done for making it on a small budget. It was a success. Here's some more money to do another one," but the BBC's attitude is, "Well done for making it on a shoestring. Having demonstrated you can do it £1.8 million, we'd like the next set of six episodes for £1.2 million." And I'm not sure that I'd like to do it cheaper next time. It wasn't easy doing it as cheaply as we did. Good things and important things went because we couldn't afford them.

Things that you've managed to reinstate in the novel.

Doing the book, knowing that whatever was cut out of the series could still go into the book, kept me sane. A decision was made to edit the series so that it was a complete action thing, a rollercoaster ride, which didn't allow time, for instance, to establish Richard's character in the first episode. That was why I was asked to put in that to-camera piece at the beginning, so that people would know that Richard was supposed to be the hero of the story, not just someone Door happened to bump into. And that was because bunches of decisions were being made by bunches of people about how the series should be shaped. *Neverwhere* the novel is my "director's cut." I began writing it as we began shooting the series, and any alterations that were made to the series due to lack of money or aesthetic disagreement, I redid my way in the book.

You've written a children's book, The Day I Swapped My Dad For Two Goldfish. It's very funny, the kind of

book a parent won't mind having to read over and over again a million times to a child.

Oh good! That was why it was written. I wanted to make it something that a kid will love on a kid's level and that a grown-up will love because of the way it's constructed. I wrote the first three paragraphs one day and then didn't know how to carry it on, and then in February 1994 I was supposed to be writing Episode 2 of *Neverwhere* and I was having trouble with it because this was 18 months after I'd written the first episode and we'd only just got the green light and in the intervening period the characters had gone cold, turned to cardboard, and I was staring at the screen one day, feeling incredibly grumpy, pulling up old files and looking at them, you know, the way you do, and I brought up the first three paragraphs of *The Day I Swapped My Dad For Two Goldfish*, and suddenly I knew what the next line was. Two hours later I'd finished it. I still don't know whether it took me two hours to write or two years. Probably two years. I think it was processing in the back of my head somewhere all that time. I'm really pleased with it. I love the tone of the narrator's voice, that wonderfully flat kid's-eye view of things. I love the way he keeps not telling you important things until a paragraph or two later, like why his little sister is going, "Mumf, mumf, mumf." Because he's tied her up and stuffed a sock in her mouth.

Dave McKean is doing the illustrations. What's the secret to a successful and lasting artistic collaboration like the one you and he enjoy?

In my case, it's working with a genius. I doubt he says the same thing, but nevertheless I think he's a genius. Working with Dave is wonderful because I'll give him stuff and he'll give me back something that's better and stranger than I could ever have imagined. He's my sternest critic. He really is. He was vitally important to *Mr Punch*, which is probably the best thing I have ever done. I did a first draft of the script that anybody else would have taken, although I knew it was a first draft, and he pointed out exactly where I had got it wrong structurally and what needed to be fixed. For instance, originally the Punch and Judy show that runs through the story was not linear, the scenes were all out of order, and he said no, it had to begin and end and continue as the story continued, even though we were moving around in time in the experience of watching the Punch and Judy show, and that was absolutely the right decision.

Almost everything you've done, includ-

ing the cover to *Neverwhere*, has Dave McKean's imprint somewhere on it. It lends a nice sort of unity to your work.

I was really relieved that not only did we get Dave to do the cover, but we got Dave to do the title sequence for the series. It's the first piece of film work he's done, and it works beautifully.

You moved to the U.S. a couple of years ago. What do you miss about dear old Blighty?

Leaving aside everything, and leaving aside the most obvious answer, which is irony, I would say Radio 4. I thought the World Service would be some kind of substitute, but it's not. I miss Radio 4 enormously. I miss intelligent radio, I miss radio drama, I miss *The Archers*, damn 'em. I live in this Addams Family house with 15 acres of woodland and a river, all costing less than a tiny flat in central London, this wonderful 120-year-old brick pile which has even got a spire, dammit, and yet I've been fairly solidly homesick since moving there, and if anything ever gets me out of there and back to England it'll be Radio 4.

Speaking of radio drama, you've adapted your graphic novel *Signal to Noise* for radio.

I've done a whole lot of interesting things this year, and the most fun I've had all year was doing *Signal to Noise* for Radio 3. There I was, sitting in this old studio in the middle of Broadcasting House, and it was wonderful. Doing radio drama is not like filming, in as much as you can do it quickly. You don't have to light a scene and get the cameras in position and all that to get the set-up. If you're doing a scene that's a couple of minutes long and you do ten takes, then the scene is done in 20 minutes, whereas if you were to do it as a film, that would be a full day's work.

You've worked in just about every medium available. You've even co-written a rock album with Alice Cooper (*The Last Temptation of Alice*). What else is there for you to try your hand at?

I'll probably write some more novels, not because I'm a novelist but because I haven't yet written a novel I'm happy with. It might take me five or six, or ten, or 20 novels before I get it right, but when I do, that'll be it for me. I'm looking forward to doing a movie. Directing a movie.

The track record for writers directing movies hasn't exactly been a reassuring one. Did you ever see *Maximum Overdrive*?

Wasn't it awful? Then again, I think Stephen King is a fine and wonderful novelist, but I can't think of any film scripts by Stephen King that I've liked. I like the Kubrick *Shining*, and I like the King book, but I'm not ter-

rribly looking forward to the King-scripted TV miniseries. There's very little ego bound up in this desire to direct. It's chiefly the desire to tell stories my way, not filtered through someone else's vision. I've just finished adapting one of my short stories into a script. The story's called "Snow, Glass, Apples," and it's basically *Snow White* from the Wicked Queen's point of view, in which you realize that all the Wicked Queen did wrong was not go far enough. I wrote that as a short film for me to direct. I'd also love to direct a movie of *Death: The High Cost of Living*, because I know better than anybody else how it should be. It would be a very easy shoot. Just go on location in New York during a summer for a few weeks. No special effects. The nice thing about *Death*, too, watching the nightmare and agony they're going through trying to get the script right for the *Sandman* movie – it just keeps getting wonkier and wonkier the more they try to fix it – is that *Death* is already story-shaped and would make for an interesting hour-long film. And I can go in and add the stuff I'd have written had I had more pages in the original comics series, play a little more with whether Didi is actually crazy or not, that sort of thing.

Do you think that, when that's done, you'll know how Alexander felt when he wept because he had no more worlds to conquer?

I genuinely see that as a problem just because of the way I'm built. Talking to friends of mine who are real novelists, I realize that I'm not built like that. For them, it's just go on and write the next story. Each novel is a new and separate thing. I'm like, "Well, what if you've done a good one? Wouldn't you stop then?" Having done *Mr Punch*, I didn't really care whether anybody liked it or not. It was the first graphic novel of mine where I could look at it when it was finished and see that it was everything I wanted it to be. I think it bears rereading. I think it has all the emotional baggage, the weird sort of cockeyed honesty, that it needs to make it work. I think it's good and I'm very happy with it. That doesn't leave me believing the next graphic novel I do can only be inferior, but it does leave me with very little desire to get on and do another one. I don't really feel the urge to go back and tell another story purely for the sake of telling another story. I'm happy to be able to sit back and know that I got one right, and then go on and try something else.

James Lovegrove would like to express his gratitude to Lorraine Garland and Mary Renouf, both of whom went to great lengths to make this interview possible.

By the time Samantha Stockard arrived in Meadow Lane the market was deserted, the traders gone, the stalls packed away, the road strewn with rubbish. She parked her car in front of the café.

She walked up to the window and looked inside. A man in a white apron was mopping down the floor. Behind him, a young woman sat alone in a plastic booth. She seemed to match the description supplied by Marcia Anson: late teens or early 20s, long yellow hair twisted into dreadlocks, jeans ripped at both knees, oversized jumper looking more than a little frayed, a rhinestone stud glinting in the flesh between her mouth and chin. A cracked mug sat on the table in front of her; she stared down at it without expression, oblivious to Samantha's presence on the other side of the glass.

Samantha stared at the young woman, transfixed. She'd seen her before, she was certain of it. But where? Perhaps it would come to her later, once they'd had a chance to speak.

She walked around to the entrance. It was locked. She knocked on the glass. The man in the apron waved her away. She knocked again, gesturing for him to come to the door.

He finally put down his mop and opened the door a crack. "Sorry, love. We're closed."

"I don't want to order anything; I just want to talk to that girl," she said, nodding towards the booth. "It'll only take a minute."

The man narrowed his eyes, taking in Samantha's neatly groomed bob and office-style clothing. "In some kind of trouble, is she?"

"Not at all," she assured him. "I just want to talk to her."

"All right." He stepped aside to let her pass, then touched her on the arm, lowering his voice to a whisper. "You mind yourself, love. Anna's a bit..." He tapped the side of his head with one finger. "Know what I mean?"

On the one hand, she was relieved to hear the other woman referred to as Anna; that meant she'd definitely found the right person. On the other, she didn't like the way the man kept pointing at his head. "I'm sorry?"

"She's got something wrong upstairs, love. I let her sit in the café sometimes, so long as she don't bother me customers, 'cause she's only young and I feel sorry for her, but I wouldn't credit anything she says if I were you. And I wouldn't turn my back on her," he added

darkly.

She looked over at Anna and watched her set the cracked mug upside down on the table, then lean forward to sniff the base. "I'll keep that in mind."

She walked over to the booth and introduced herself. "I understand you knew a woman named Eleanor Burdon."

Anna glanced up at Samantha then quickly looked away. "You're surrounded by flickering shadows of forgotten ghosts, shrouded by the clinging remains of the person you were and the place you came from. You don't belong here."

"Come again?"

"Eleanor Burdon," Anna muttered, gazing down at the table. "Poor old dearie. Only met her the once, you know. She was just like you. Lost and confused and frightened. Gives me a headache to look at you, you know that? You're so blurred around the edges, you keep shimmering in and out of focus like a reflection in a rippled pool."

A stream of brown liquid was dripping off the edge of the table; Anna's upside-down mug hadn't been completely empty. Samantha turned to leave; this was a waste of time.

"You don't belong here," Anna called after her. "You know that, don't you? Deep down inside, you know it. Or at least you suspect. You've started to suspect, haven't you? That's why you're here, isn't it?"

Samantha stopped and turned around. Anna was right: that was exactly why she was there. Maybe it didn't matter that the girl was obviously off her rocker; Eleanor Burdon had worried that she might be going mad, and now it was just possible that Samantha was losing her mind, too. Maybe it took someone crazy to understand what was going on; maybe that's why Eleanor had said that Anna had believed her and understood. Samantha had to take a chance; she had to tell her. "I think something terrible happened to me this morning, but I can't remember what it was."

Samantha had tried to hide her nervousness as she followed her new boss, Janet Hale, down the dimly-lit tenth-floor corridor of the north London tower block where Eleanor Burdon had lived. The old woman's flat was all the way down at the end, then around a corner. Samantha had followed Janet's example and stepped into her hooded white coveralls in the hallway outside the flat. They had each put on rubber gloves, and

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Molly Brown

then Janet had opened the door.

"Oh my God!" Samantha reeled backwards, raising a hand to her mouth.

"You're not going to throw up, are you?" Janet asked her. Samantha shook her head.

"Just try and hold your breath a minute," Janet said, "while I get some air into the place." She disappeared into the flat.

Samantha pulled her hood up, covering her chin-length hair, then reached into her bag for a surgical mask.

She found Janet in the living room, opening every window.

Walking into the dead woman's lounge was like walking into an oven. Samantha moved around the room slowly, sweating in the street clothes beneath her coveralls and trying not to breathe too deeply; despite the open windows, the pungent odour of rotted meat was overpowering.

Yellow foam erupted through the worn upholstery of the dark green settee. A bowl on the floor held several clumps of furry green cereal. A mug sat on top of the television, sprouting something that looked like asparagus and smelled like vomit. A folding metal table was buried under a mountain of yellowing paper: old newspapers, letters, God knew what. More paper overflowed from the half-open drawers of a small wooden cabinet. The threadbare carpet was littered with balls of hair and dust and foam from the sofa.

Janet shook her head and tsk'd, pursing her lips and deepening the furrows between her eyebrows. "Look at this place." She glanced at her younger companion. "All right, Sammy?"

Samantha gritted her teeth; no one had called her "Sammy" since she was ten years old. And she'd felt ill from the moment they'd picked up the key from the caretaker. Janet had introduced him as Hughie, adding that they'd known each other more than 30 years. He looked about Janet's age – mid to late 50s – with a shiny bald pate and thick tufts of reddish hair growing from his ears.

Hughie had insisted they have a cup of tea before going upstairs. Samantha had sipped her tea in silence, trying not to stare at the caretaker's ears – until he'd started regaling them with the story of how he'd come to discover the body, which he did in graphic detail. After that, she couldn't even drink her tea. And she still couldn't stop thinking about some of the things he'd said, like how he could have sworn the old woman was moving until he realized it was only the maggots wriggling.

"I'm fine," she lied.

Janet looked dubious. "You sure? You're awfully pale."

"I'm fine." This was Samantha's first case; she didn't dare admit to feeling sick for fear she'd end up back in the housing department where she'd spent the last three years as a typist.

"If you say so." Janet opened the door to another room and vanished inside. Samantha stayed where she was, not certain if she was expected to wait for Janet's instructions or impress her with her initiative. She was 23 years old, with an expensive haircut, a car and a mortgage, but Janet seemed to think she was some kind of naïve child. She decided to impress her with her initiative. She crossed over to the table to look through some of the dead woman's papers.

"Sammy, come here," Janet called from the other room. Samantha sighed. So much for initiative.

She walked up to the open door and saw that Janet was in the kitchen. "I want you to see this," Janet said, opening each and every cupboard. Apart from a jar of tea bags and a couple of glasses and plates, the shelves were empty. She opened the refrigerator. It, too, was empty, except for one carton of something solid that used to be milk. "No food," she said, shaking her head. "Not a crumb. You often find that." She lifted the flap to the ice-making compartment and stuck her hand inside.

"What are you doing?"

"Sometimes they hide things in there."

"Hide what?"

Janet shrugged. "Money, jewellery, whatever." She reached behind the fridge and unplugged it, then walked past Samantha to open another door, this time to the bathroom. Nothing there but a tub and a sink and an old fashioned gas water-heater. A towel had been draped across the medicine cabinet. Janet lifted a corner of the towel, revealing the cabinet's mirrored front, and chuckled to herself.

"What's funny?" Samantha asked her.

"Hughie's covered all the mirrors again. He does it every time."

Janet left the room before Samantha could ask why. She shrugged and followed her back into the lounge. There was only one door left. As they approached it, Samantha thought she heard something: the whine of a distant motor, perhaps. Janet took a deep breath and reached for the handle. "This'll be it, then," she said.

"Bloody hell," she said a moment later.

The noise Samantha had heard was the buzzing of insects; the windows were covered with bluebottle flies. The moment the door opened, they swirled into the air, becoming a whirring black cloud heading straight for the two women. Samantha screamed, batting her hands wildly in front of her face. Janet calmly crossed the room to open the windows, shooing as many of them as she could outside. "Why don't you start on those papers in the lounge?" she asked, sounding tired.

Samantha didn't bother telling her that was what she'd been trying to do when Janet had called her into the kitchen. She was just grateful to get away from the flies and the sickening stench of death; the smell was even worse in the bedroom where the old woman had lain undiscovered for two weeks in the middle of a summer heatwave. She was beginning to have second thoughts about this job; maybe secretarial work wasn't so bad after all.

Janet followed her into the living room. "You know what to look for?"

"Yes."

The older woman pulled a chair up to the table and gestured for Samantha to sit down. "Insurance policy documents, a will, anything with an address... even just a name."

They'd been through this back at the office. "I know."

"Okay," Janet said, heading back into the bedroom. "Shout if you need me."

Samantha pulled off her gloves and started organizing the chaos in front of her into tidy stacks. There were dozens of unopened envelopes, some addressed to

Mrs E. Burdon, others addressed to Occupier. Some said things like: *You may already be a lucky winner.* Others had the words *Final Demand* printed across the top. She put them to one side, to look at later, then picked up a spiral-bound notebook. She flicked through several pages. Nothing useful, just a lot of twee little rhymes written in a precise – if slightly shaky – hand, each ending with the words: *by Eleanor Burdon.*

She could hear Janet through the wall. Rummaging through the old woman's wardrobe and chest of drawers, looking for anything of value that might be passed on to a relative – if they could find any – or sold at auction to pay for the funeral. Then she heard Janet call her name.

She put down the notebook and looked into the bedroom. The remaining flies had settled into a huddle around a light fixture in the ceiling.

Janet was on her hands and knees beside the bed. "Help me with this."

Samantha knelt down beside her and saw a large trunk pushed up against the wall. She got hold of one end while Janet grabbed the other. They pulled it out only to find it wouldn't open. "You any good at picking locks?" Janet asked.

"I've never tried," Samantha said carefully, not certain if that was meant to be a joke or not.

"Then I guess we'll have to find the key." Janet stood and walked over to an old-fashioned dressing table to look through the dead woman's jewellery box. The dressing-table mirror had been covered with a sheet.

Further along the wall behind the dresser, a floor-length black curtain hung across a narrow doorway. Samantha wondered what was behind it. Then she looked down. "Oh God," she said, leaping to her feet.

Janet turned around. "What's the matter?"

Samantha pointed to the discoloured patch of floor that marked the spot where the old woman had lain as clearly as if her body had been traced in chalk. And she'd just been kneeling on it.

Janet made a little tsk'ing noise. "Poor thing, to lie there like that for so long with no one knowing. Trouble is, it could happen to any one of us, Sammy. Any one of us. I always used to tell my children, you won't let that happen to me, will you? But my son married a woman in California and my daughter's in Australia. I'll be lucky if I see my grandchildren once a year. So who'll miss me if something happens? Who'll even know?"

Samantha shrugged, feeling uncomfortable with the way the conversation was going. "They'd miss you at work," she said.

"But I'm retiring year after next, Sammy, remember?" She shook her head and smiled. "Sorry, I don't mean to come over so morbid. It's just..."

She turned back to the jewel box on the dresser. "I was younger than you when I started, you know." She laughed. "My first year, I nearly got the sack for wearing my skirts too short; they told me as a representative of local government, my knees had to remain covered at all times."

Samantha walked over to the black curtain and pulled it to one side, revealing a walk-in cupboard, empty except for a wooden chair and a full-length mirror on a metal stand.

"Janet, why does Hughie always cover the mirrors?"

"It's an old superstition. When someone dies, you're supposed to cover every mirror in the house so the soul of the deceased doesn't get trapped behind the glass. And one thing you don't want is ghosts getting stuck inside a looking glass, because you know what they do when that happens? They reach out and grab any person who becomes reflected in that mirror, and they take them far away."

"Away? Away where?"

"Bournemouth," Janet said. "Where do you think?" She smiled and raised an eyebrow. "Know why it's seven years bad luck to break a mirror?"

Samantha shook her head.

"Because it takes seven years for the soul to renew itself."

"Pardon me?"

"The idea is the reflection represents your soul, so if you shatter the reflection, it stands to reason the soul will be shattered as well. Then, as if that wasn't enough, what do you think your shattered soul fragments go and do? They only get themselves imprisoned inside the shards of glass! Stupid things. No wonder it takes seven years to sort them out." She laughed. "So now you know."

Samantha giggled. "Now I know." She started to draw the curtain back across the mirror.

"Tah-dah!" Janet exclaimed triumphantly.

Samantha let go of the curtain and swung around, startled.

"Told you I'd find it," Janet said, holding up a small key.

Samantha knelt beside her boss as she turned the key in the trunk lock and suddenly everything else – the smell, the insects, even the outline of a neglected corpse only inches away from their feet – was momentarily forgotten. The trunk was full of treasures. Beautiful, sparkling treasures.

"Oh, it's gorgeous!" Janet gasped, carefully unfolding a floor-length red silk dress wrapped in tissue paper. It must have been 50 or 60 years old but it was in perfect condition. Beneath it, she found a ballgown – white, embroidered with gold – and a long jet-black sheath covered in shiny glass beads.

There were shoes and handbags, some leather, some alligator, some velvet studded with rhinestones. There were long white gloves, hats with veils, capes with fur-trimmed hoods, silk stockings with seams. In a large padded envelope at the bottom, they found a scrapbook full of press clippings and faded black and white photos of a beautiful dark-haired woman dancing in a variety of glittering costumes, sometimes with a male partner, sometimes as part of a chorus line, sometimes alone beneath a spotlight.

"So that was Eleanor Burdon," Janet said, carefully turning the brittle pages. "Sometimes I'm glad we don't know the future, Sammy. I mean, look at her, smug as the cat that got the cream, wasn't she? Would she have wanted to know how it was all going to end? And if anybody'd told her, you think she would have believed them for one moment? I doubt it. Bet she had the world at her feet in those days. Bet she thought she always would." She sighed and shook her head. "Poor thing."

"Poor thing," Samantha agreed, nodding.

Janet put the book to one side and picked up the

black beaded dress. She stood, holding it in front of her; the hem dragged on the floor. "She was tall, that Eleanor. More like you."

"I'm only five seven."

"Taller than me. Taller than most of the old lady's generation." She told Samantha to stand up, then pressed the dress into her hands. "Now hold it up properly. Here, that really suits you. Have a look at yourself. Go on."

Samantha pulled down her mask and turned to face the mirror in the cupboard. She nearly laughed out loud; she looked ridiculous holding a beaded dress in front of a pair of baggy coveralls with a surgical mask hanging loose around her neck.

Then something went wrong. Everything reflected in the glass seemed to develop a kind of after-image, like a photographic double-exposure. Including her. She seemed to have two bodies, one superimposed over the other. She moved her head a few inches to one side; her duplicate head followed a fraction of a second later. She blinked several times, trying to clear her vision, but couldn't get her two sets of overlapping eyes to open and close in sync; one always seemed a millisecond behind the other.

Then everything went black. "Janet?" she said.

No reply.

"Janet, where are you?" she said, fighting back panic. "Janet, I can't see!" She heard a sound of creaking hinges, then a beam of light cut through the darkness, moving in a graceful arc as it illuminated her surroundings, section by section.

She was standing on a bare concrete floor surrounded by black walls splashed with large red letters spelling something she couldn't make out. Then she realized why she couldn't read the writing: it was backwards. She had managed to decipher the first word – *Gateway* – when she was blinded by a torch beam shining into her eyes.

She heard at least two sets of approaching footsteps, and then the beam moved on. She stood rooted to the spot, unable to believe they hadn't seen her.

"Bloody hell," a man's voice said as the light fell onto a young woman with long blonde hair, slowly swaying in mid-air, a rope around her neck.

Samantha tried to run, but she couldn't move. She tried to scream, but no sound came out.

Janet suddenly crossed in front of her, pulling the curtain across the cupboard doorway. She seemed angry. "Are you mutt and jeff or something, girl? I've been telling you the last ten minutes: stop admiring yourself and put that bloody dress away, we've got work to do!"

"Ten minutes?" Samantha repeated. It seemed like less than ten seconds since Janet had handed her the beaded gown. She became aware of a tingling sensation in her hands. She looked down and saw they were clenched into tight fists, the knuckles white. And they were shaking. Could she really have lost ten minutes? She let go of the dress, carefully uncurling her aching fingers, and saw a line of deep ridges where her nails had dug into her palm.

Nothing about the room she was in seemed right, though she had no idea exactly what was wrong. She looked up at the light fixture in the middle of the ceiling, half-expecting to see a squirming mass of flies. There

weren't any, of course; the flat reeked of insecticide. The chemical smell was so strong she could taste it.

She reeled over to one of the windows and stuck her head outside, gasping for breath. "I must have blacked out from the fumes. I'm sorry, I'm really sorry."

"Come on, girl," Janet said, "let's get you out of here for a bit."

They knocked on several of the neighbours' doors before they left the building. No one they spoke to knew anything about the old woman, though one suggested they try the residents' association.

There they found a man who knew Eleanor Burdon. He said she used to be quite active in the association, serving on the pensioners' committee, though she'd resigned three or four years ago. "She was 80-odd and getting a bit frail," he explained. He also said she had a daughter somewhere: possibly Canada, though he couldn't be sure.

"Do you know the daughter's name?" Janet asked him.

He shook his head. "I only know it wasn't Burdon. Eleanor was widowed twice, and I'm sure she said the daughter was from the first marriage."

"Thanks for your help," Janet said, turning to leave.

"You know who you ought to ask about Eleanor," the man called after them. "They do a writing workshop at the community centre, down the north end of the estate. Eleanor was always writing poems and things."

The sign on the padlocked front door of the community centre read: *Closed as of 15 June due to lack of funding. If you are unhappy about this, write to the council.*

They put Eleanor's trunk into a storage locker, then crossed the hall to the Arts Department, which the latest round of cuts had reduced to a single desk at the back of Social Services. Of course as funeral officers their "office" wasn't any better, consisting of two desks in the Environmental Services Department, sandwiched between Refuse Collection and Vermin Control.

It only took a minute in the Arts Department files to find the name and phone number of the woman who'd run the creative-writing workshop on the Verdant Meadows Estate. Janet decided Samantha should be the one to make the phone call; the only way to learn was to do.

Samantha returned to her desk in Environmental Services, dialled the woman's number and introduced herself. The workshop leader, a Mrs Marcia Anson, confirmed that Eleanor Burdon had once been an enthusiastic member of her writing class, but had stopped coming the previous autumn. "Do you know how she died?"

"I think she had a stroke," Samantha said. "Something to do with her brain, anyway."

"Oh, dear," Mrs Anson tutted. "When did it happen?"

"Some time during the second week of June; I don't –"

"Well, she was still alive on the twelfth," Mrs Anson interrupted. "I saw her in the café in Meadow Lane Market, sitting in a booth beside the window. I would have stopped to say hello, but she seemed to be in the middle of a rather intense conversation and I didn't like to interrupt. Of course now I wish I had."

"Who was she talking to?"

"Some young girl; I doubt she was more than 20. Looked a bit like one of those anti-road protester types,

all torn clothes and messy blonde hair, with some kind of ring through her lower lip. I have no idea what she and Eleanor could have found to talk about, really. I mean, Eleanor always took such care of her appearance; what could those two possibly have had in common?"

"Ask her about Eleanor's family," Janet whispered.

"Did Mrs Burdon ever talk about her family?"

"Not really. I think she had a daughter somewhere, but that's all I know."

"Ask about friends," Janet prompted.

"Did Mrs Burdon have any friends that you know of?"

"I think she used to be involved in the residents' association. You might want to ask someone there."

"Well, we can strike that one off our list," Janet said as Samantha put down the receiver. She reached into one of the bulging carrier bags full of paper they'd brought back from the dead woman's flat. She pointed to another, on the floor beside Samantha's feet. "Look for anything with an address."

"I know, I know," Samantha said, emptying the sack onto her desk.

Most of the bag's contents turned out to be rubbish: junk mail, bills, old calendars, expired money-off coupons, recipe cards and so on, all of which could go straight into the bin.

A short while later, Janet stood up and put on her jacket. "It's almost five. Go home, girl, and forget about the dead until tomorrow."

Samantha yawned and rubbed her eyes. "All right." She slid her chair back from the desk and crossed over to the coat rack where she'd hung her jacket that morning. She glanced towards the doorway and saw that Janet was already gone; she hadn't waited.

Samantha sighed and shook her head. What did she expect? A slap on the back? A round of applause? After the way she'd passed out in the dead woman's flat that morning, she needed to prove herself more than ever. But how?

The only way she could think of was to keep working.

She crossed back to her desk and started sorting through another mound of paper. There were several letters from someone named Pamela – no surname – with a return address in Paris. She printed off one of their standard letters and put it in the "out" tray. Sending the letter made her feel as if she'd finally accomplished something, even though there was little hope of getting a reply – the most recent of Pamela's notes was dated 1975.

She found several black and white photographs of a man in a military uniform. She turned one over and saw the words: *Terry, home on leave, 1943*. Husband? Brother? Lover? She had no way of telling.

She put the photos into an envelope for safe keeping, then picked up the notebook she'd seen on the old woman's table that morning and started flicking through it again. Nothing but page after page of handwritten verses. Completely useless.

She was about to put it down when the neat script of the previous pages suddenly gave way to an almost illegible scrawl.

Must hurry! Memory fading. Like dream, one moment so clear, the next, gone forever. Saw a girl. Room with black walls. Something written in red paint, letters backwards. Spelling? No, too late, already forgotten. The girl:

blonde hair, eyes pale blue, wide open and staring. Rope around neck. Hanging from a pipe? Not sure. So young, so sad. Wearing jeans, I think. Getting vague now.

Just looked at clock. Lost four hours! How? Seems like minutes. Something is wrong. Room seems strange, everything strange.

Feels different. Can't say how. Knew a minute ago, but it's gone now. Whatever I thought I knew, gone.

Samantha put down the notebook, shivering. Something was nagging at the back of her mind, something about footsteps and a beam of light. She shook her head and forced her attention back to the notebook.

The old woman's writing reverted to her original precise hand.

11 June.

I just re-read the above and freely admit it sounds like the ravings of a madwoman. Yet 24 hours have passed and I am still unable to shake the feeling that I am in the wrong place and I don't know how I got here.

12 June.

I now know what has happened and I think I know how to fix it. I told Anna everything...

Anna had to be the young woman Marcia Anson had seen with Eleanor.

She not only believed me, she understood. We talked for hours about choices and probabilities, the physical and the mental and infinite numbers of universes. Then I brought her back here to see the psychomantium...

"The what?" Samantha said out loud.

...and she confirmed that it was hers.

My only hope now is to go back the way I came.

The rest of the book was blank.

Anna nodded to the seat across from hers. "Sit down," she said quietly, "and maybe I'll tell you what you want to know."

Samantha sat. "Eleanor Burdon wrote in her notebook that she'd talked to you about your psycho... something."

Anna picked up a salt shaker and tossed it from one hand to the other, giggling. "Psychomantium. Never heard the word myself 'til I met the old woman."

"Well, what is it? What does it do?"

Anna emptied some salt onto her palm and licked it, glancing sideways at Samantha. "It's a mirror used for contacting the other side."

"The other side? You mean the dead? Eleanor Burdon was trying to contact the dead?"

"Well, she was that age, wasn't she? Not so long to go herself, wanting to know who or what was waiting for her. And it worked, of course. She *did* contact the dead. Only trouble was, the dead person she contacted was me."

Samantha threw up her hands. "Well, thank you for your time."

Anna put the salt shaker back on the table. "No, you don't understand." She pulled back one of her sleeves, revealing several scars across her wrist. "I've been out of hospital almost six months now; they closed my ward. I've got these pills I'm supposed to take, but they make my tongue swell up..." She shrugged and rolled the sleeve back down.

"Anyway, about three, four weeks ago, I found some rope in a rubbish bin. I imagined myself with it wrapped tight around my neck, my face bloated and purple, my

lifeless body swaying in the breeze. I even imagined my soul, plummeting into hell. I saw myself writing a sign in big letters so everyone would know where I'd been all these years and where I was going. It would be so easy, I thought, so easy...

"But I didn't do it; I only thought about it, right? And then I guess I started walking. I don't remember where I went or what I did, but it felt like I'd been going in circles for hours. And then I get back to the place where I've been staying and it's been done over! Everything I own is gone, including this full-length mirror on a metal stand. A few days after that, some old dearie comes up to me, claiming she's seen me in this mirror she bought off a market stall. She said she'd been sitting in the dark, waiting for spirits to appear in the glass, when suddenly she sees *me*, hanging dead from a rope. I was gobsmacked. She gave me a perfect description in every detail of something I had *considered* doing but hadn't actually done.

"It was then I started to notice the way the old woman kept shifting in and out of focus, and I soon found that if I stared at her hard enough, she became almost transparent." Anna raised her pale blue eyes to meet Samantha's. "Just like you."

Samantha looked down at her arms and saw they were covered in goosebumps. Somewhere in the distance, she imagined she could hear the sound of buzzing insects.

Samantha sat on a folded blanket in the middle of a bare concrete floor. The room was dark and almost bare of furniture. A large pipe ran from one corner of the floor, up a wall and across the ceiling.

Anna lit a kerosene lamp and placed it on the floor before her. "Welcome to my place."

"I've been here before, haven't I? In a dream. I remember it from a dream."

Anna didn't answer.

"But the room was different then. The walls were painted black – there was something written on them, but I couldn't make out the words. I heard a window being forced open and then I heard footsteps. It was a dream, wasn't it? Or am I dreaming now?"

"Does it matter?"

"It matters to me. I don't understand where I am. I don't understand what's happening. The last thing I remember is looking in a mirror..."

Anna sat on a wooden crate, her face hidden in shadow. "How much do you want to bet there's at least one universe where *you're* the one who's dead, not me? Must be at least one, don't you think?"

"Universe?" Samantha repeated. "What do you mean – a parallel universe?"

"It's all about possibility, isn't it? I saw something about it on TV while I was in hospital. Every possibility has to happen somewhere. So sometimes I'm dead, sometimes you are, sometimes neither of us, sometimes both of us. And sometimes one of us is a ghost, trapped inside a mirror."

Samantha thought back to what Janet had said: that trapped spirits reached out to grab the living. "Are you saying I'm stuck inside a mirror?"

"I'm saying you're stuck inside a universe. Where that universe is, I don't know."

Samantha thought back to the last line in Eleanor Burdon's notebook: *My only hope now is to go back the*

way I came.

She must have tried to go back through the mirror. And it had killed her.

The sign outside the local library said that they were open until eight o'clock on Mondays and Tuesdays. Samantha glanced at her watch – nearly a quarter past seven – and hurried up the stairs to the reference section.

She found what she was looking for in a book on folklore and superstition: *The reflection in the mirror mirrors the soul. If the glass holding your reflection should ever be broken, expect seven years' despair and misfortune, for seven years be required for the renewal of the soul.*

To break the cycle and release the soul, the broken pieces must be collected together and buried in the earth.

It was after midnight when Samantha opened the door to Eleanor Burdon's flat and walked through to the bedroom, carrying a hammer and a sheet.

She wrapped the sheet around the mirror, laid it down on the floor and attacked it with the hammer, shattering the glass. She put on a pair of gloves before she picked up the sheet full of jagged splinters and carried it downstairs, placing it in the boot of her car.

Then she drove to the nearest park and buried all the pieces.

Samantha went into the office early the next morning. She picked up the dead woman's notebook and started going through it page by page. Nothing but twee little rhymes.

"Hello, Sammy," Janet said brightly when she came in half an hour later. "Quite the early bird, aren't you?"

Samantha sighed. "I'm still trying to find an address for Mrs Burdon's daughter, but so far, nothing. Not even a clue."

"What are you talking about, you silly thing? We wrote to her yesterday; don't you –" She was interrupted by a ringing telephone. "Janet Hale," she said, lifting the receiver. She listened a moment, then reached across her desk for a notepad.

They went out on a new case later that morning: a former psychiatric patient who'd hung herself three weeks earlier.

Samantha followed Janet into a dark ground-floor room with a bare concrete floor. The walls were painted black with the words: *Gateway to Hell* splashed across them in huge red letters. The room was empty of furniture.

Janet shook her head. "Can you credit it? They reckon somebody burgled the place with the poor girl's body still hanging from that pipe. I sometimes wonder what kind of world it is we're living in, Sammy, what kind of world."

"I wonder," Samantha agreed, nodding.

Molly Brown's previous contributions to this magazine include "Bad Timing" (issue 54), "Ruelle in Love" (issue 76), "Women on the Brink of a Cataclysm" (issue 79), "Feeding Julie" (issue 100), "Community Service" (issue 107) and "Doing Things Differently" (issue 111). She now has her own web page – see the mention in our Small Ads.

Cookery is the new rock and roll, according to some, merely on the strength of a few extra hours' telly and a Delia Smith live tour. Well how about science fiction and fantasy as the new rock and roll then? Not, I hasten to add, that I feel we need a new rock and roll at all – I'm perfectly content with the one we've got, thank you – but if we need another genre that can make headlines, style pieces, think pieces and generally fill newspaper supplements, then I ask again, what's wrong with skiffy as the new rock and roll? Those be-jeaned, rock-star-T-shirted and greasy-haired types who inhabit sf conventions look much more like rock-and-rollers to me than the ladies who lunch with Delia.

Indeed an sf convention has a whole lot more in common with a rock concert – the same atmosphere of beer and testosterone, the same sense of "look at me" with which some stars make their entrances and the same remorseless merchandising – than any number of polite people learning about crostini. If only we could find and strangle the man who wrote the "anoraks of fire" BBC press release and smuggle a postmodernist humorous quiz somewhere onto the airwaves we'd have cracked it. We could call the quiz show "Have I Got Aliens for You" or "They Think It's All Spaceships" or "Never Mind the Tribbles." David Pringle could referee and Kim Newman and Terry Pratchett (in larger and more assertive hats each week) could captain opposing teams of alternative comedians in alien foreheads. Remember – you heard it here first.

In real life, however, 1996 was a bit of a sad year for box-watchers. The BBC hit 60 but decided to celebrate with a bogus "viewers' poll" and award ceremony. Kudos to the *Dr Who* fans who managed to upset the BBC hierarchy by the dastardly expedient of, er, voting for what they liked. However just as we all know the film of the year always wins the "100 Best Films" poll and the boy-band of the moment always wins the "top 100 singles of all time" polls, we must realize that Colin Firth's wet-T shirt moment as Mr Darcy doesn't make him the Best Actor in the Universe quite yet and we will need at least a ten-year run of polls before we can tell whether he is really a Stairway to Heaven or a Take That and Party.

The schedules filled up with science fiction and fantasy, although sadly mostly in the form of cheap filler rather than real meat. BBC 2 gave us *Sliders*, *Deep Space 9*, *Voyager* and *Third Rock From the Sun*, as well as the usual repeats of *The Next Generation*, *Quantum Leap*, *Red Dwarf* and so on. *Sliders* was quite infuriating in the occasional lack of narrative thread from one

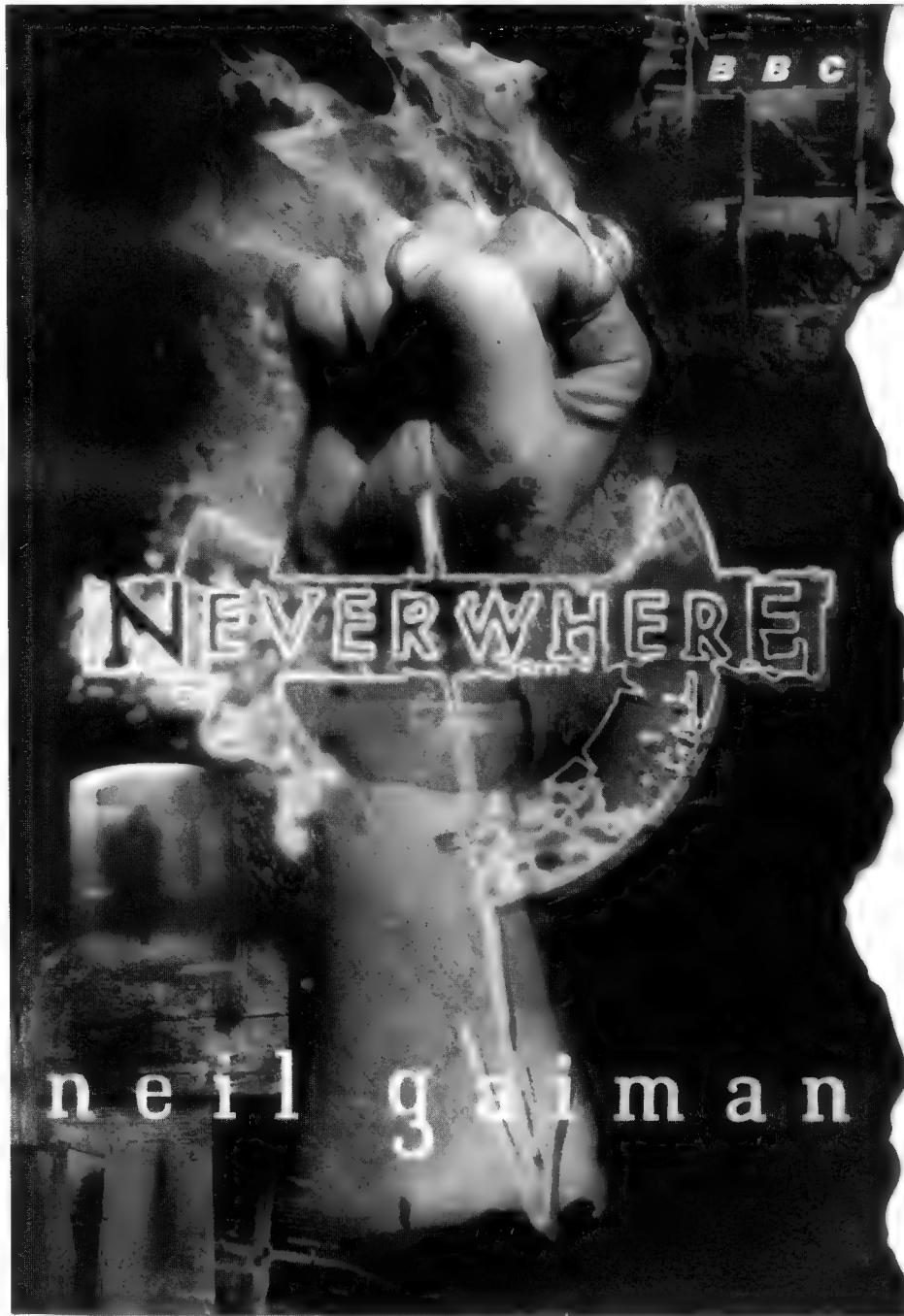
episode to another, so that I was never quite certain whether I'd missed an episode and needed to check my video, or whether the BBC were just proceeding on the "hey, Barney, pass me another tape of that sci-fi crap off the shelf" method of scheduling.

BBC 1 gave us *Lois and Clark*, still renamed as *The New Adventures of Superman*. Does anyone have any idea why? Is "Lois and Clark" too challenging a concept for the early-evening audience? A particularly rewarding feature was the later repeat on Saturday morning kids' time with some quite bizarre cuts of even the mildest language or depictions of violence: "Superman's going to kick some Nazi butt" being the level of language likely to corrupt and deprave our youth, seemingly.

Channel 4 gave us *Babylon 5*, bless them, although I was never

Tube Corn

Wendy Bradley



Characters of *Neverwhere*:

from top to bottom –

Richard Mayhew, played by Gary Bakewell; Door, played by Laura Fraser; The Marquis de Carabas, played by Clive Russell; show stealing Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar, the thoroughly evil cut-throats (Vandemar is played by Hywel Bennett; Croup is not credited in the BBC's publicity handout); and Peter Capaldi, taking time out from his role as Uncle Rory in *The Crow Road*, plays the arch-villain Angel Islington.

quite certain they knew what they'd got until they had the clever idea of putting it in the "classic serial" slot on Sunday teatime. You could tell it was a clever idea, when the BBC decided to nick it, for *Voyager*. Now look, please, please, PLEASE tell me that Bruce Boxleitner's character – who jumped off a cliff, had a spaceship land on top of him and was nuked – is really, really dead this time? No, I didn't think so either. Sigh.

ITV managed to squeeze *Highlander*, *Robocop* and *Seaquest*

DSV into the schedules at odd times if you checked your listings mag carefully enough. Still, finally I get it about *Highlander*: see Mac fight. See Mac suffer special effect. See Mac get kit off. If only they could have afforded Keanu or Brad I'd have been a happy woman. *Robocop* I find consistently unwatchable and *Seaquest DSV* is just a cheaper *Trek* clone – all enclosed spaces and aliens out there – but which cheats by not using a consistent map.

However there were three serious bits of work that came up in '96, although I should say at the start that none of them really worked for me. First of all, I really, really wanted to like *Neverwhere*. After all this time without a British fantasy series that wasn't designed purely for children or for laughs the sheer representative urge, the urge to get behind your team, meant you had to be rooting for it to be a success. Unfortunately the fact that you want women to be taken seriously in politics didn't make Mrs Thatcher a good Prime Minister any more than wanting TV to take fantasy seriously made *Neverwhere* a good series.

The main trouble with *Neverwhere* was that it looked cheap. I don't care how much money they actually spent on it or how many interviews Neil Gaiman gave about life on set being like life on a Fellini film, not much of this alleged riotous anarchy seemed to make it to where it really counts, on the screen. The sadly un-Felliniesque (*hey guys, let's hang the Xmas lights right here!*) scenes at the floating market for example: tired punks on scaffolding and a roll of cloth behind the fairy lights do not add up to something rare and strange. I longed for *Neverwhere* to be cool: to be hip, grown up and grip, to prove that there's life in the old genre yet, not, please God, to embarrass us when those people who know "you like that sort of thing" sit back and snigger because if you like that sort of thing then that is the sort of thing you must like.

And yet... the beginning was cheap and uncool and really quite cringe-making, and there was no buzz – no one talked about it in my office in the way, say, *Babylon 5* and *The X-Files* form part of the common conversa-

tional currency – and yet I stuck with it, and stuck with it, and finally, round about the time it became clear who was the bad guy, I suddenly realized I was enjoying it. The cut-up format didn't help – in a film you would have taken the rules of the world as a given and wouldn't have been quite so irritated by, say, the false climax at Lord Ratspeaker's at the end of episode one and the double dip of using the "look – I'm luminous! I'm an angel!" ending twice. But by the end I found myself thinking, "well, yes, maybe this isn't half bad actually."

Dr Who for the 90s? I don't think so. But at least it wasn't as bad as the actual return of the good Doctor. I'm afraid I hated everything about the new *Doctor Who*. I hated the casting and the slant on the character – Dr Who should be the irritatingly certain one, who has read to the end of the script and knows where the plot is going and is insufferably smug about explaining it to everyone else, not some vulnerable semi-catatonic. I hated the expensive way it was shot on film rather than cheap video-tape and cheap sets held together with wit. I really, really hated all that messianic crown-of-thorns imagery at the end. I hated the way they hyped it, they way they tried to take our money by putting it out on video first, and the way they used co-production money to make it and then let it drop because the ratings weren't high enough. And I particularly hate the way the BBC seems to see the loyal fan base and their vociferous advocacy of the programme as a threat and yet still tries to milk every conceivable drop of profit from the back catalogue.

I have a suggestion. Why doesn't the *Dr Who* Appreciation Society put together a consortium to write and produce, professionally, half a dozen episodes on the same sort of budget as, say, *The Demon Headmaster* (a particularly witty and cheap children's sf/fantasy serial I hesitate to mention in case the BBC finds out it exists and decides to kill it off)? I challenge the BBC to buy and screen them. And then let's see: put up or shut up. The franchise either lives or dies, instead of lingering on as now in a ghostly ghastly half-life.

Finally there was one serious piece of British TV science fiction in the year and I missed it. I accidentally channel-hopped into a few minutes of the serial *Cold Lazarus* and was mystified and enraged to find that, because I was never particularly fond of Dennis Potter's work, I had missed something that seemed to be good and seemed to be in my area of interest. But then of course it had been sold as Potter – as serious, worthy, as an event – but never, ever, as mere science fiction.

Wendy Bradley

I'm not one of those people that question things philosophically. Never have been. You know what I mean, the folks who go around asking "Well, if there's intelligent life in the universe, then why ain't we heard from them?" Or – now this is my favourite – "If time travel's possible, then why ain't people from the future running around here now?" Ha ha.

That kind of questioning never made no sense to me. Hell, y'all should know that. Say frinstance there ain't no intelligent life. Or, say they's got some kinda "Prime Directive" thing. Same difference. There just ain't no way to prove out any kind of answer, less the subject in question up and clarifies the matter. Lack of evidence. And no, those UFO freaks don't count. Them's just a bunch of hippies strung out on dope, if you ask me.

Time travel, though, that brings up boocoos of theories. Or, at least it did back when questions like that will be relevant. Stuff like paradoxes and alternate timelines and integrated timestream, blah blah blah. Truth is, no one knows because no one's done it yet. Time travel is possible. Einstein said as much. I proved it, but then, that really wasn't my fault.

I'm about to meet my great-great-great grampa for the first time again. It's really getting tedious. Oh, he's a likeable fellow. Still talks German, though, so I can't understand a lick of what he's saying. Will come over a helluva long time ago. Fights with Sam Houston at San Jacinto, or something like that. Sharing a tent with one of them fellows what captured Santa Anna.

Well, anyway, I'm in a pretty ornery mood. Being scapegoat for the universe has a tendency to do that, I reckon. The big mess with the timestream has me all bejabbered, with everyone hollering at me, and this one scrawny little guy keeps howling about the grandfather paradox. I'm stewing over this when I meet gramps, so I kill him. Pull out my Colt .45 and *bang!* Blow the top of his skull clean off.

Now don't get me wrong. I ain't usually the violent type. I only use the pistol to shoot cottonmouths out on the farm, but that scrawny fellow got me so dang mad with that paradox crap that I had to prove – to myself, at least – that all bets are off. There ain't no more time paradoxes. Never have been.

Big mistake on my part, though. Ticked great-great-great grampa off something *fierce*. Beat the tar outta me, like I ain't never been beat before. I figure that's how we took Texas from the Indians and Messskins – those German immigrants were tough old buzzards. Gramps warned me there's more where that came from. Obviously he could speak English by then.

My Paw ain't too keen on me right now, either.

"Always said you should've stayed home and worked the farm," Paw says. "What the hell's all this temporal mechanics garbage good for, anyhow? Screwin' up the world, that's what. Like the dang Republicans don't do a good enough job of that on their own. Fix things back, boy. Leave well 'nuff alone."

That's Paw. Ain't exactly the diplomat, is he? Real selective memory, too. Back when I landed that full scholarship from Rice, he just about ran us bankrupt calling all our friends and relations and friends of relations to tell them all. I ain't exaggerating. Not much money in rice farming, but seeing how I'll be the first of our family to go to college, Paw figured he was enti-

Project Timespan

Jayme Lynn Blaschke

tled to a little bragging.

He got even worse when I get my doctorate from MIT. When I walk across the stage to accept my degree, he stands up in the audience, whoopin' and waving his cowboy hat. Imagine how that's gonna go over, what with those Yankees there already thinking we're little more than ignorant hicks.

"That's my boy! That's my genius boy down there," Paw shouted so loud I wanted to crawl beneath the podium. "Y'all know what he's going to do? What old Jules Verne and Doc Brown only dreamed about in the movies. He's going to build the best dang time machine y'all ever saw!"

So he doesn't know Verne from Wells. What of it? Paw never lacked for enthusiasm, I'll give him that. Confidence, either. He *knew* I was going to succeed. For him there was never a doubt. Me, I wasn't so cocksure.

Paw's right, though. I did build the time machine, or I will. It gets tricky keeping track of these things.

I'll join Project Timespan immediately, mainly because I'm already doing a good chunk of work on the project in school. NASA's running it down in Clear Lake, so that's a plus – I won't be too far from the folks.

Most of the tough, theoretical work'll already be done by the time I join up, but how, I've never figured out. The project lands in NASA's lap because some newt-brained congressman once heard the phrase "space-time continuum" on a *Star Trek* rerun. So NASA becomes the National Aeronautics and Space-Time Continuum Administration.

Don't get me wrong. The NASA people are good people, but the paper pushers spend so much time trying to get everyone to be "can-do" cheerleaders that nothing much ever gets done. That, and the fact Congress cut NASA's budget six times in the five years I worked there. Guess who got squeezed first?

Despite it all, we got results. Go figure. In my first year, we'll solve the final theoretical hurdle. Once construction begins, we quickly realize the hard part's behind us.

Actually building the time machine was *easy*. I don't mean easy like going out to your garage and hitching up a lawnmower engine to an alarm clock, but once we knew what we were doing, it was more to the level of putting together a cyclotron, and heck, anyone with enough money can do *that*.

Dang, it's pretty. A perfect sphere, twenty feet, three

inches in diameter. Gleaming silver shimmering iridescent-like in your peripheral vision. Built for a crew of three – the brass wants to link it symbolically with Apollo – and capable of full life support for three weeks.

We'll test it quite thoroughly, of course. And we're not going to send it back in time until we know just what sort of paradoxes we may be dealing with. We only sent it into the future. I remember the first test clearly, because it will be such an anticlimax. We sent it forward in time one nanosecond, unmanned, of course. I watched the booger the whole time, and saw nothing. Not even a blink, but the meters went loco. My time machine worked.

We're checking it for a week, squeezing it for every little scrap of information we can. Everything's perfect. Not a gremlin to be found.

We made more test runs after that, gradually increasing the time displacement until we were up to a minute. *A whole minute.* Buddy, that's something. Try watching 67 billion dollars' worth of hardware you're responsible for just disappear off the face of the earth, and see if you don't agree with me.

One thing the trials showed us was that the temporal displacement ain't instantaneous. The atomic clocks in the sphere were slightly off what they should be – not enough to be detected after any one trial, but after the seventh run the effect had compounded enough to show up indirectly on some of the more extensive calibrations. No one expects that, and some folks panic before we figure out it isn't that big a deal. Buckinson calculated the lag to be roughly one second for every half-million years, and said it's a good thing we didn't junk the life support the last time they slashed our budget.

We ran trials with plants – some of Wagoner's potted ferns and a bonsai tree – and when they don't curl up and die, we send through a chimp. It'll live, too.

Big problem crops us. Our budget is under the knife again, only this time the dang congress won't be satisfied with slowly bleeding us – they'll have Project Timespan on the chopping block.

So I did the only thing I could think of – I talked Wagoner into scratching the rest of our scheduled trials and announcing plans for the first manned time trip. To save Timespan, it couldn't be a piddly jump like we'd been doing. It has to be big. The most awe-inspiring spectacle ever.

We will go to the End of Time, by golly. Now, *that* dog'll hunt!

Fifteen minutes after our announcement, McDonald's offers us a 40-million dollar sponsorship deal, Coca-Cola matches, and the Timex/Swatch consortium doubles it. I hit the talk shows and speak to five separate congressional hearings. I'll tell you, I ain't never been so glad to get back home in all my life. By the end of the week, our funding was restored *in full*, and those rascals gave us a blank check to complete our mothballed second sphere.

"Well, Ladd, what do you think?" Wagoner asks as we watch the three chrononauts – *dang*, that sounds so stupid! – climb into the sphere's open hatch. "You've worked all your life for this moment. Without you, none of this'd be happening. You're making history. Shoot, you're making the *future*."

Nothing in the history of mankind will ever generate this kind of interest or excitement. The six networks all

set up for live coverage, and the video feed goes out to 196 countries. Word has it they're even defrosting old Walter Cronkite for at least a few hours to be at the launch.

That's what everyone'll call it. The *launch*. Lots of hoopla. The Pope'll even go on the air to say time travel ain't blasphemy. Go figure.

More than a million people've come to Houston to be a part of history. Every Jesus freak and doped-up hippie on the planet's here. Trouble is, the lab room's just big enough for the sphere, support equipment and a dozen tech crew. Not many folks're going to see it in person. The Astrodome, Oilerdome and Rocketdome have been sold out for weeks to watch on the big screens. When the sphere just vanishes, they'll be disappointed.

Wagoner's really getting into this political stuff. It's making me nervous. July 20th is the launch date, picked to coincide with the first moon landing.

The 20th arrives. Even the big countdown clock at Canaveral – or Kennedy, depending when you are – is in on it.

"4... 3... 2... 1" the announcer says. The sphere ripples, then is gone. In my mind, I hear six billion people groaning in disappointment.

No one noticed anything was wrong at first, but we figured it out soon enough. The *déjà vu* tipped us off.

Déjà vu hit everyone, and I mean *everyone*. Just a little peck at first, but soon it got to be three, four attacks an hour. Folks got a mite jittery right quick, and the more skittish ones took to howling like a scalded cat every time it hit.

That just got everyone edgy. The astronomers are what scared the piss outta me. A short while after we launched the sphere, the star boys noticed something funny with their telescopes. Not funny ha ha. Funny bad. The red shifts were messed up. Everything was too red, and getting redder.

The first I catch wind of this is when Carl Sagan is on CNN explaining that because stars and such are growing redder, they're moving apart faster. I just about poop in my pants. If the universe's expanding quicker, it's aging quicker, too. I feel sick.

Buckinson was way ahead of me.

"Geez, Ladd, we're screwed," he says to me when I reach the lab.

"Tell me it's not us," I beg him.

"Fat chance," he answered. "I've checked. It's the temporal displacement field. It isn't being contained within the sphere. It's acting infinite, like gravity – dragging every atom in the universe along with it to the end of time. Everything's accelerating, and soon, in a month maybe, it'll start to contract. There's not a thing we can do about it."

"How? How the hell'd something like this get past us?" I asked. "We tested!"

"It's not a pronounced effect, kind of like the time lag they experience inside the sphere," Buckinson says. "On our short trials the effect was negligible. Small enough to miss. A trip to the end of time, though..."

"Wait a minute," I go. "The time sphere only has life-support for three weeks! They'll be back before –"

"No." Buckinson shook his head. "I thought of that. The temporal acceleration increases exponentially. The universe'll catch up to them by the end of time. When they pop out of time warp, they'll see us at the final

armageddon."

"We've got to keep this quiet until we figure out what to do," I said.

The phone rings. I answer it. The *Dallas Morning News* reporter asks if it's true we'd doomed the universe.

Being burned in effigy by six billion was the least of my worries. Wagoner swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills that night and never woke up. I'm on my own. Desperate, I seize on the one option I see. We still have the second sphere. We couldn't send it to catch the first sphere before it reached the end of time, but we could sure's hell send it to the beginning of time. With any luck, the two temporal displacement fields will cancel each other out, and all we'll have lost is a billion years or so.

The Secret Service will guard me 24 hours a day as we rush the second sphere to completion. There will have already been three attempts on my life, and the Pope excommunicates me, even though I'm Lutheran. Go figure.

We finish the second sphere three days after the astronomers detect the first hints of blue shift in the universe. We only put the second sphere through three trials, none longer than a second so we don't compound the bluing. Three chrononauts, hailed as the saviours of the universe, enter the sphere, even though they knew they might be marooned forever in the timestream. This time there ain't no crowds, 'cept for those in the churches. No countdown. The techs look at me. I give the word go. The sphere ripples, and is gone.

I was right about the second sphere matching the first's pull. I was wrong about its effect.

Have you ever heard time tear?

Of course you will. Everyone in the universe hears it, feels it. Time can't take the strain. It stretches. Snaps. Ceases.

Everyone in the universe hates me, hated me, will hate me. When is irrelevant now. Now is irrelevant now, without time. I'm the only fellow ever to destroy a dimension.

I'm being tried, convicted and executed by every court on Earth. A billion to the billionth power of alien races – some long extinct, others not yet evolved – track me down and put me through all sorts of godawful tortures.

The only ones happy will be the space jockeys. Without time, $e = mc^2$ kind of lost its teeth, know what I mean? They can go anywhere in the universe. When they got there, though, they found out they'd already been there, and come after me as well.

No one understands, though. It ain't my fault. It ain't like I set out to destroy time. God don't exactly put warning labels out, you know. I was only doing my job – and that ain't no Nazi copout, neither Hell, I try to save the universe, but ain't no one sees it that way.

I gotta go now. Mahatma Gandhi's coming at me with a flechette. Go figure.

Jayne Lynn Blaschke is a new writer who lives in Temple, Texas. "Project Timespan" is his first published story.

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'THE INSECTILE SWARM SETTLED UPON ME.'

THE BLACK BLOOD OF THE DEAD.

Being the sequel
to the popular
novella
‘The Hunger
and Ecstasy
of Vampires’

By BRIAN STABLEFORD.

Illustrated by SMS

PART TWO.



The story so far...

Oscar Wilde is telling the story of one of his last excursions in Paris, in the autumn of 1900. He encounters a mysterious figure who looks like Death but turns out to be the “great detective” in whose company, five years before, he had listened to Edward Copplestone’s account of visionary adventures in futurity. The emaciated and fearful detective, who is using the alias Sherrinford, gives Wilde (whose own nom de guerre is Sebastian Melmoth) a manuscript entitled *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires*, which could only have been dictated to him by the late Count Lugard. The emaciated Sherrinford requests that Wilde confirm the truth of this seeming impossibility to a hastily-gathered audience consisting of the reclusive littérateur Rémy de Gourmont, his friend Alfred Jarry and the famous astronomer Camille Flammarion. These three, together with Wilde, then listen to the detective’s account of his

own adventures under the influence of Copplestone’s time-transcending drug.

Sherrinford explains that on his first expedition he found the Earth desolate, its atmosphere no longer capable of sustaining life, but that his timeshadow was saved from destruction by a host of tiny “nanozoons.” After receiving the formula for an advanced form of the drug he returned to the future to find himself in a dome enclosing an artificial environment resembling a cosy vision of rural England. An android claiming to be the reconstituted Edward Copplestone told him how the empire of the vampiric overmen was destroyed by a hail of cometary debris displaced from the outer solar system by the passage of a massive body. This story has now reached the critical point at which the detective’s interview with Copplestone is interrupted by the shattering of the dome and the invasion of the enclave by a host of variously-sized machines...

"The insectile swarm settled upon me like an all-embracing suit of armour, so rapidly and so efficiently that my attenuated body had not time to draw a breath of poisoned air. For 15 or 20 seconds I was wrapt around like a mummy, quite incapable of motion although I could still see through transparent eyeholes let into the mask. Then my seamless outer tegument became fluid. What happened thereafter was entirely the action of my new superskin. I had no idea what to do in order to preserve myself from harm, but the machines already had a plan of their own worked out.

"Copplesone's little fragment of England had been a more futile gesture than I had realized. He must have suspected that it would become a target almost as soon as I materialized within it, so he had made contingency plans. While my imprisoned body found itself running faster than any mere human being had ever run, leaping obstacles with astonishing grace, I recalled his description of his own sensations when he had been captured by a similar assembly of machines.

"Copplesone's assisted flight had been horizontal, through a forest not unlike the ones in which he had walked as a boy. Mine was a downward flight into a space which opened up before me as I tumbled into it. I cannot fully explain the horror of that descent, but it seemed very dreadful. I was never falling free but the actions performed by my living suit of armour did not echo anything my limbs would normally have done. I was descending into darkness; I could see little but I could imagine much. I already knew that the Earth had become the grave of an entire species; it was into that illimitable grave that I knew myself to be descending.

"When Copplesone had been caught in like manner his flight had been unhindered, hurried simply because time was short. I was pursued and harried by enigmatic enemies. Indeed, it seemed as if all the devils in Hell were after me, determined to crack the kindly shell which had enveloped me and expose my too-frail flesh to laceration and destruction. I did not know what might become of the body I had left behind if those buzzing furies succeeded in their mission.

"Mercifully, my intelligent armour was not without its own resources. As I ran down into the bowels of the dead Earth the fingertips of my protective shell hurled sparks of fire in every direction, which shot some few of my tiny pursuers out of the swirling air. They did not retaliate in kind, but whether that was because they lacked the inclination or the capacity I could not tell. There were larger machines emerging from the dark abyss to either side of me, ranging in size from that of a wasp to that of a vulture. They all spat sparks of their own into the vaporous inferno, lending support to my vengeful fingers.

"I suppose my descent lasted less than two minutes, but they were the most hectic minutes of my life. The end came when I was unceremoniously engulfed by the fathomless dark. I thought I had been swallowed, and feared that I was about to be digested, but light returned soon enough.



"I remained encased in my suit of armour but I was reclining now and there was another window visible behind my transparent visor: a window which showed me the alien sky, much clearer now. The fervour of battle had evidently passed its maximum, but I did not know whether my unexpected adversaries had been finally banished.

"A sibilant whisper in my ear said: 'Don't be afraid; it will not last forever.' I leapt to the conclusion that it meant the battle of the insects, but the voice actually referred to the unimaginably dreadful force which began to press down upon me as the container which had sucked me in leapt from its pit, driving vertically upwards with awesome insistence. I felt that I was being flattened, like a little bug squashed beneath the thumb of some invisible godling. It was as if my unnatural facial flesh were being crudely and coarsely dragged from the bones of my phantom skull.

"By the time the sensation passed I was high above the Earth. The sky was even darker than it had been before. As the Heavens reeled – sun, stars and increasingly-distant Earth sliding into new positions – the moon came into view. That part of its surface which bathed in the sun's light was bright with colour, like an enamelled brooch pinned upon the bosom of the night. It did not take long for me to deduce that the moon was our intended destination. We had risen from the Earth as though fired by a gun, or borne aloft upon a rocket's jet.

"I am sorry for that,' said the sibilant voice, which I now recognized as Copplesone's although it was being filtered through some intervening medium. 'I had hoped that my defences could stand him off... but that is by the by. Time is pressing more urgently than I had imagined, and there is so much that I have still to tell you. Listen to me carefully, my friend, and try not to let the strangeness of our situation distract you.'

"I had not lost my capacity for concentration. Even the knowledge that I was cocooned in a fabulous machine, soaring through the interplanetary aether on my way to the moon, did not prevent my paying close attention to the remainder of Copplesone's story.

"Most of the overmen who stayed within the solar system did not care a jot about Copplesone's dream of reclaiming the Earth and repopulating it with men. It made no difference to their own plans that the Earth might once again play temporary host to their unlucky cousins. A few of them took a more active interest in his proposal, assisting him in designing nanozoons which would be capable of sustaining any timeshadow that might appear on the surface of the Earth and helping him to distribute them across that surface.

"While centuries passed the number of overmen who elected to stay within the solar system continued to dwindle, and those that did remain came to prefer the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn as places of residence. They eventually left Copplesone alone – save for a legion of mechanical servitors – to keep watch over the vast grave that was Earth. Although they took care to keep in touch with him, he was appointed Emperor of the Moon by their default.

"Copplesone did not mind being left alone by the emigrant overmen. He was, after all, a member of a different species. They were prepared to adopt him, to

make him into one of themselves in every sense that was meaningful to them, but he told me that he could never have brought himself to believe that he was really one of them. He was content to continue making preparations for the resurrection of the human species, and in pursuit of that end he was prepared to be extremely patient.

"He told me all this in a level and matter-of-fact tone, but I thought even then that he was being less than honest. I suspected that he had felt his loneliness far more intensely than he cared to admit, even to himself.

"This is all very well," I told him, when he finally gave me leave to speak, "but you seem to have left out the most important explanation of all. What is happening to us now? Who is it that has taken such exception to your plan that they have launched an army of machines against it? Who is trying to kill you, and why?"

"Kill me?" he echoed, in a puzzled tone. "I cannot be killed."

"The disingenuousness of this reply only added to my exasperation. 'But I can!' I said. 'If it is me they are trying to kill the question still remains. Who is harassing us? Why are they so avid to hurt us?'

"Please don't be afraid," he said – but he must have become aware of the utter inadequacy of the injunction as soon as he had spoken, because his tone immediately grew more agitated. "Nobody is trying to kill us! All this is just a pantomime – a mere show of petulance! I'm truly sorry... I have grown so used to my immortality that I had quite forgotten..."

"Alas, my patience was at an end. 'Who?' I cried. 'For Heaven's sake, man – who sent those machines to smash your precious little haven?'"

"The man whose example you followed," said the soft voice. "Lugard. I am not *quite* alone, you see – I only wish I were."

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I glanced at my companions to see whether the convolutions of the detective's story had begun to weary them. I would not have been surprised to see them exhibiting signs of impatience, but they seemed quite undisturbed by the lateness of the hour. I was the only one fidgeting, and that was attributable to my horrid malaise.

"I should not have been surprised when Copplestone spoke Lugard's name," the detective went on, "but I had been following a different line of thought. When Copplestone informed me that a few of the overmen had taken an interest in his plan I had begun to wonder whether they might have been more interested than they pretended.

Copplestone had lived 20,000 years since he had first penetrated the veil of the future, and he had had plenty of time to forget the anxieties that had possessed him then, but I had lived only five years, and I remembered the fears he had voiced when he told his story. In 20,000 years he had grown used to thinking of the overmen as benign and generous beings, but when he had first met them he thought them menacing. He had thought that they might reach back through time to kill him, if they could, lest he should terrify the world with news of their covert existence and vampiric

nature. He now seemed content to accept that they had not done so – but I wondered whether they would have done so if they could, and whether the overmen had kept a closer watch on his grand plan than he had supposed. While his endeavours seemed futile they had doubtless been content to let him play – but as soon as he had opened up another link with the past they might well have become anxious to break it. I said as much to Copplestone.

"If the overmen thought there was a real possibility of altering the past," he said, "they would be very glad indeed to discover it. They would be delighted with the opportunity to divert the wayward mass that launched the Hail of Hell. In fact, they hold a very different view. They do not believe that any information you could carry into the year 1900 could inspire mankind to their destruction, and I agree with them. Their ancestors enjoyed the best protection of all: the refusal of belief. Humans had learned to laugh at the very idea of vampires, and could not have unlearned the lesson in time. Did not some Churchman say that the Devil's greatest weapon was the fact that people had ceased to believe in him?

"In any case, it is no part of my plan to save humankind from self-destruction. Lugard might want that – if Lugard knows what he wants, which I doubt. I do not. A race so foolish as to bring about its own extinction does not deserve to be saved *en masse*, and if saved would surely deliver itself to a similar fate. What I want is to save the best – the cream of the human crop, who might become the founders and the parents of a better race.

"My hope is that if the art of casting timeshadows is properly cultivated by the people of the 20th century, a new human race might yet be enabled to reclaim and repossess the world it lost. While the Earth belonged to the newly-triumphant overmen there was no room for human beings there, but those overmen are gone now and their descendants have other matters to occupy their bodies and their minds. Earth lies dead and desolate, but given time enough, and reason enough, the world can be made habitable again. I already have the tools with which to do it and the time required – what I need is a company of brave time-travellers who will serve as the nucleus of humanity reborn. You must make my gift available to the very best specimens of the human species: those who have the will, the intellect and the moral force to build a brilliant New Jerusalem upon the dark and dismal plains of the derelict world!"

"While Copplestone was reaching this conclusion he and I had been drawing ever nearer to the moon. The effects of our initial acceleration had relented, and for a while it had seemed as if I had no weight at all. Now, as the heavens tilted again and the moon disappeared from view, I felt the pressure of a measured deceleration.

"The alteration in the aether-ship's attitude brought the Earth back into view through the viewing-port. The disc was partly lit by the sun and I was surprised by the brightness of the illuminated crescent – but I soon realized that I was looking at a vast and empty wilderness of ice. Although I continued to take in everything that Copplestone's voice was pouring into my ears I

studied the field of stars which lay behind the Earth. It seemed curiously bleak and barren in spite of its astonishing richness – as cold and indifferent in its glimmering plenitude as the ice which enshrouded the corpse of the Earth.

"It was hard to believe that Copplestone's mechanical slaves could refashion the dead planet as a fit habitation for human beings, even if they were given a thousand years to do it – but they would have a thousand years, or 10,000, if they needed it. Any time-shadow which came into this new era could be preserved indefinitely, exactly as Copplestone's had been – and Lugard's too.



"Our landing on the moon was very gentle, and I did not realize that our journey was concluded until the stars were eclipsed. The aether-ship had descended into a dark cavern, whose roof slid back into place like the lids of a great eye. Still the sibilant voice was whispering, telling me the story I have relayed to you – and Copplestone seemed to have a great deal more that he still wished to say.

"When the ship was finally at rest I made as if to rise from my couch, but I was still encased in my second skin and the machines would not respond to the prompting of my limbs. Copplestone advised me that I had best let the suit walk for me until I had become accustomed to the fact that I now weighed only a sixth of what I had weighed on Earth.

"The aether-ship had been lit from within when the eye above us closed, but there was no light within the cavern into which it had descended. Presumably the machines which had charge of me had no need of visual guidance, but I found the darkness discomfiting. As I was carried from my resting place I had to rely upon other senses to keep track of my progress for at least three minutes. Mercifully, we had not far to go before we came into another lighted space. We emerged into a huge hemispherical dome, not unlike the one on Earth but four or five times as large. Its curving roof displayed the same pattern of hexagonal and octagonal panes, through which the stars could be seen in all their awesome profusion.

"The ground beneath this panelled sky was likewise an echo of the Earth, but not the cosy artificiality of an English garden. There were trees in vast profusion: enormously tall tropical trees, so densely packed that I immediately labelled the place a jungle. There were brightly-coloured parrots in the branches, and monkeys too, which showed no fear of Copplestone or myself as we climbed out of a trap-door set a hundred yards or so from the dome's rim.

"The besuited Copplestone – who looked more like a heroic statue hewn in black marble than a man – had not taken a dozen steps away from the trap-door when the ground beneath his feet lost its solidity. It dissolved into a fluid mass, into which he immediately sank. The shell which confined him became suddenly denser, as if it had been dipped in pitch. His voice, which was still explaining how things stood between the various factions of the overmen, was cut off in mid-sentence.

"I was so used to marvels by now that I felt no imme-

diate fear or alarm on his behalf; it took time for the realization to form that he had been attacked.

"When own limbs moved reflexively, as if to go to his aid, my own suit of armour would not respond; it evidently had other instructions. I found myself turning to retreat – but the trap-door from which we had emerged was no longer accessible. Squatting on top of it was the strangest and most terrible creature I had ever beheld.

"The monster was humanoid, save for a thick tail and horns sprouting from its temples. It was ten feet tall and its scaly body was silvery in colour, although it had the most intimidating blood-red eyes, with serpentine slit-like pupils.

"The diffuse sound in my ears suddenly took on the semblance of the mocking crepitition of a hellish fire, and the monster became a veritable demon. *This is not the moon at all, I thought. It is the domain of lost souls. It is Dante's Hell!*

"Had I been in proper possession of my own body I would have frozen momentarily in shock and horror, then run as quickly as I could to one side or the other, away from both the demon and the living ground which was gobbling Copplestone up. The shell which contained me was not blessed with any such panic reflex. It moved unhurriedly towards the monster. No matter how hard I strained, I could not make it stop or turn. It did raise its arms – with my own inside them – in order to fire off a barrage of sparks of the kind it had earlier hurled at the plague of insectile marauders, but the demon soaked up the sparks with contemptuous ease.

"As I drew closer and closer it spread its own gigantic arms, as if to welcome me into a fatal but curiously loving embrace. Perhaps my armour tried to duck under the spreading arms, or perhaps it tried to retaliate with some cunning wrestler's trick, but whatever trick it attempted failed. Clumsily – but no less effectively for that – the demon gathered me to its bosom, clutching me as if I were a beloved but rebellious child that needed to be taught a stern lesson.

"I screamed in sheer terror. I longed to hear the sibilant voice reassuring me that all was well but the voice had gone and there was only a senseless crackling, like the sound of dry stems caught between the blades of a mechanical harvester."

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"As I gave way to terror the situation became very confused. I was squeezed and I was twisted, so tortuously that I felt sure that my limbs must break and my phantom rib-cage must be crushed. For a moment or two I could not tell up from down. The only freedom of movement I had within my shell was to close my eyes, and that I certainly did, although the transparent lenses that had permitted me to see through the shell were immediately pressed in upon the closed lids, generating splashes of false light to add to my confusion.

"When I could see again I found that I was still encased by an extra skin, but I seemed to be much taller than I had been before. I was running through the jungle at an astonishing pace, as if every stride were carrying me ten or twelve yards. I knew that there were *things* pursuing me but my carrier would

not deign to look around so that I might see what they were – nor did it deign to look down so that I could confirm my horrible suspicion that the demon had enveloped me, armour and all. I felt sure that I had been swallowed whole and that the body which raced so swiftly with my own inside was the demon's, gleefully transporting me to my allotted place of torment.

"I ran and I ran, so swiftly that the trees became a green blur and I became dizzy. I felt several abrupt impacts upon my back, each one blunted by the layers of insulating material but painful nevertheless. That awful sound had dulled my ears by now, and I could not tell whether the faint voices I began to discern within the crackling were actual or illusory. Then blackness came again, and I knew that my carrier had dived into the ground, into some lightless tunnel.

"I no longer had any sensation of movement. The crackling in my ears faded, by slow degrees, into near silence and I lost all sense of direction. I suspected that I was still moving, but I had no idea where or how fast. I tried hard to be grateful that I was still able to draw breath, and that my unnatural body was no longer being wrenched this way and that without regard for my comfort or my safety.

"I cannot tell how much time had passed before light struck my open eyes again, but it felt like an age. When the light did return I saw the monster standing before me again, tall and proud in its armour of shining scales, staring at me with its great crimson eyes – whose vertical slit-like pupils seemed to me to be little windows allowing me to look into the dark corruption of its soul. It took me several seconds to realize that the slitted pupils were, indeed, little windows and that I was looking through them at a mirror. The dark corruption I had imagined was within my own soul.

"I heard laughter, and made as if to turn. I was both surprised and relieved when the massive encasement in which I was imprisoned responded to my will and turned with me. I was even more surprised, and immeasurably relieved, when the encasement began to dissolve, lowering my own phantom feet to the ground and then flowing away from me like a huge living shadow in full retreat across the polished floor.

"You must forgive my little joke," said the voice whose laughter I had heard. The speaker was sat on a leather-backed chair mounted upon a low podium, positioned behind a very ample desk. The desk-top was laden with papers, most of which gathered into half a dozen stacks of different sizes. There was also a decanter, half-full of red wine, and a goblet not quite drained to the dregs. We were in a chamber crowded with bookshelves ten or twelve feet tall, crammed with

volumes of many different sizes, miscellaneous bound in every sombre shade imaginable. There was no door visible from where I stood; for all I knew, the library might have extended indefinitely in every direction, its shelves forming the corridors of an infinite and inescapable maze.

"I don't know what Copplestone has been telling you," the speaker went on, "but I expect that it involved the reclamation of the Earth by new men woven by machines out of the wispy flax of timeshadows. Does he still style himself Emperor of the Moon, or has he set aside his false humility sufficiently to claim the title of Saviour of Mankind? That is his glorious aim, is it not? To bring about the Millennium: the thousand-year reign of peace, harmony and joy?" He paused for a second or two before adding: "I knew that it would be you... but then, I had the advantage of knowing that the formula Copplestone had left behind had been destroyed, and that you were the only one with curiosity enough to recover it. Somehow,

I never got to the point of telling Copplestone that, even when we were on speaking terms; there is a perversity in me that has always rejoiced in keeping secrets."

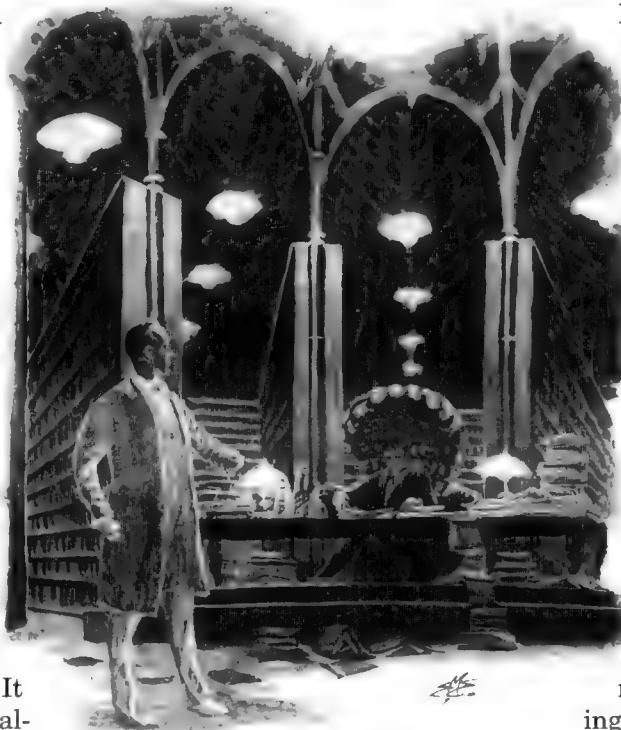
"He looked human enough, but I knew that he was no more human than Copplestone had been. I could put a human name to him without any difficulty at all, but I suspected that he would not insist as determinedly as Copplestone had that he was still the man he once had been. This, I realized, was a man who had done everything within his power to shed his old self, as if he had been a newly-metamorphosed dragonfly casting off its chrysalis. I noted that the sleeves of his black coat were stained with brown and red, and the

cuff of his shirt was spotted with dark blue. They were, I judged, the stigmata of the antiquarian: the dust of crumbling leather bindings and the dried-up residue of ink. There was something oddly comforting in the sight of such trivial symptoms of carelessness and imperfection.

"I am glad to see you, Count Lugard," I said to my tormentor, as soon as I had recovered my wits, "although I could have wished for a less dangerous introduction. But then – you always have played fast and loose with other people's lives, have you not?"

"He scowled at that. "I suppose you mean the girl. I should have suspected that the Fates would cheat me in that matter. They never would play fair but there is one thing which can compensate for the knowledge that one must spend eternity without a lover. Are your powers of deduction equal to the riddle?"

"Oh yes," I replied. "Men like you can never sustain their erotic affections for very long, but they can bear



"I KNEW THAT IT WOULD BE YOU."

grudges and nurse hatreds eternally. All you would need to sustain your interest in existence is a rival.'

"You will concede, in that case, that you and I are not so very different after all," he said craftily. "According to your biographer, you have no time for lovers, but you love to pit your wits against the Napoleons of crime. You will be grateful that I took the trouble to kidnap you. Copplestone can only bribe you with the prospect of some drearily emasculated Utopia, but I can offer you the possibility of meeting worthy enemies."

"I have never lacked for enemies," I assured him. "Nor, it seems, does Copplestone."

"He is not my enemy," Lugard said. "He does not even believe, in his heart of hearts, that I am his. I am his adversary in certain matters – but in the grander scheme of things I am his partner, his other half. We are in this together and always will be. He should have let me take you when I came for you, but I suppose he had not finished his tale of woes and wonders. He was a better raconteur in the old days, was he not? Immortality has made him tedious."



"I looked around at the crowded bookshelves. 'It seems to have made you into a scholar,' I said, 'or is all this merely for show?'

"It is the heritage of human and vampire wisdom," he informed me coldly. "Copplestone was a scholar once but he was never an aristocrat. He is content with mere data, which can easily be stored in mechanical memory; he never had my reverence for the actual objects of antiquity. I wish I could show you the scope of my collection, but there is no time. I do not know what dosage Copplestone's machines advised you to take, but I fear that he has left us insufficient time to meet and converse as we would wish. If he had not, his minions would have followed you, and would even now be battering at my door. If you are to learn all that you need to learn, we must employ a cleverer method than a spoken monologue. I know that this will be hard but I must ask it of you regardless: *Will you trust me?*"

"Why should I?" I retorted.

"His answer was immediate. 'If you do not,' he said, 'you will return to the past with only half a story. The puzzle will be incomplete and the decisions which you have to make will be shots in the dark. Copplestone is right about one thing: the future of mankind, on Earth and in the Universal Scheme, may depend on what you choose to do when you awake from this dream of future possibility; it would be a shame to make your choices blindly.'

"What exactly are you asking of me?"

"I mesmerized you once before, without your consent – but this time I must have your fullest co-operation. If you consent, I have nanozoons at my beck and call which can make your memory wonderfully receptive, so that I can fill it with remarkable rapidity, but the process is not without its hazards. Dare you accept the challenge? I must have your answer now, for I fear that you might be snatched back into the past at any moment."

"I have always prided myself on being a decisive man – a man ready to respond to any challenge, all the more

so if the challenges in question are dangerous and bizarre. There was only one answer I could give.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked."

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"Lugard had prepared mechanical servants to make modifications in my timeshadow which would enable me to memorize a page of manuscript at a glance, several hundred times over. He explained that this intellectual stock would not be accessible to my conscious mind in any piecemeal fashion even after my return, and would fade away within a matter of days – but after I recovered possession of the body I had left to lie in the 19th century I would be able to reproduce the entire script in a single sustained rush.

"The prospect of allowing my timeshadow to be modified by Lugard's machines was not without its attendant anxieties, but my timeshadow had already been modified once without my consent being asked, when first I ventured forth to the poisoned Earth. I was in any case completely in his power; it seemed to me that he could do as he liked with me. I agreed to his terms.

"There was no further preamble. I assume that his nanozoons were already inside me, awaiting some secret signal. When they began to do their work I was only slightly disconcerted. I felt no pain – nor, indeed, any other physical sensation that I could put a name to. My thoughts did become confused, and I had difficulty maintaining any coherent train within them, but I did not fall asleep.

"Lugard had the pages that he wished me to memorize ready on his desk. He sat me in his own chair while he displayed them to me. My eyes caught a few words here and there but I had no time to make sense of what I saw and I did not trouble to make any count of the leaves as he turned them over. When he had turned the last one I was half-convinced that the experiment had failed and that nothing had been accomplished, but he seemed sanguine enough. He sighed, with evident relief.

"It seems that we have a little time left to us," he said. "I can apologize now for my indecent haste and make a belated attempt to play the host." He poured wine from the decanter into the goblet and took a sip. "I hope your work as a consulting detective has kept you busy since we last met. How long ago was that, in your terms?"

"A little more than five years," I told him.

"So little!" he marvelled. "I have lived tens of thousands years since then; Copplestone has lived far longer. I suppose he drank tea instead of wine? Such tiny idiosyncrasies of character harden over time into badges of fiercely-guarded identity. You will discover, when you have transcribed your cargo of words, that there are four documents. The first is a formula for a more powerful version of Copplestone's drug; it is based in speculation but I have high hopes for it. The second is my account of this fabulous universe in which we find ourselves and my proposals for the resumption of human history and the completion of human destiny. The third I wrote for my own use and comfort a long time ago, but I thought it worth inclusion. The fourth is a letter – which I ask you, as one gentleman to another, to put into an envelope and deliver when you

have informed its addressee of everything that has happened to you in the course of this adventure.'

"It was on the tip of my tongue to protest, in response to Lugard's last request, that I was not a postman – but I realized that a postman was exactly what I had become. Instead, I asked him where we were, and why he had brought me here by force.

"I brought you here by force because Copplestone left me no choice," he said sourly. "I would gladly have joined him in his little garden so that we might receive you together. I would have placed my methods at his disposal, so that he could deposit as much information in your head as I have – but we hold different opinions and he was afraid of competition. Had he been able, he would have made certain that his was the only account you heard – but I knew that if I could only puncture that little bubble he had built amid the ruins of the Earth he would have to bring you to the moon."

"Copplestone fancies that he is the absolute ruler of this little world but he is not. His dominion does not extend below the surface. I am the Lord of the Lunar Underworld, and I have reached a very different accommodation with the mechanical descendants of the overmen. If he is the centrepiece of an empire, as he believes, I am the chief of the barbarians, busy eroding its borders and waiting for its fall."

"He was speaking in a soft tone but he still spoke very rapidly, leaving no opportunity for interruption. It was plain that he expected to lose me at any moment. I had another question ready, but I had no time to ask it of him. He must have seen that I was slipping away, for I saw a shadow of profound sadness flit across his features.

"He raised his glass again, in a vain attempt to produce an ironic salute. 'Farewell, my friend!' he said – and then the bookshelves behind him imploded, scattering their precious cargo across the carpeted floor. A curtain which hid a sliver of empty wall between two ranks of shelves billowed out, racked and rent by the blast, and the turbulent air filled with an appalling sound.

"My first panic-stricken thought was for my own safety. As that carefully-ordered chamber was ripped apart, and the space from which the books had been displaced was filled with angry light and black shrapnel, I tried to raise my hands to cover my eyes. I could not do it. I had already lost my tenuous physical grip upon the future. That last image was caught and frozen, engraved upon my consciousness while I fell into time. I fully expected it to be dissolved into the same chaotic confusion that had afflicted me as I moved forwards in time, but it remained; it was as if my brain was incapable of letting go of it.

"Once the explosion had been arrested in my sight the wrathful vortex centred on the standing figure of Count Lugard came to seem strangely ordered and purposeful. He had not raised his hands, nor had he attempted to dive to the floor. He remained perfectly still, his glass raised up in that last ironic salute. Had he been a man I would have been certain that death had come to claim him, but I knew that he was not a man. His whole world was collapsing in on him, and yet he remained imperturbable. Perhaps the entity with which I spoke was only a deputy: an animated

doll, disposable as soon as the conversation ended.

"I have attempted to distil what conclusions I can from that final image. I cannot believe that it was an attempt to rescue or reclaim my timeshadow; it was far too violent for that. Had I maintained my physical presence for a second longer I would probably have been destroyed. Nor can I believe that it was an act of casual vengeance by Copplestone, who was not that kind of man. The probability is that Lugard, or his simulacrum, was attacked by overmen. Some, at least, of those among whom he now lived, did not want him to give me the information which he was determined to pass on.

"I knew that if I hoped to understand the motive which might have prompted certain overmen to violence, I must search for it within the texts that he had displayed to me – and that is what I immediately set out to do.



"My return to the present was exceedingly distressing. Recovery of my body was attended by an unprecedented and appalling agony, which was doubtless prolonged because I would not permit the doctor to use morphine to alleviate my distress. I was desperate to conserve my presence of mind for the task ahead.

"I took to my writing-desk with half a dozen pens and a ream of foolscap. My hand began to write, as if of its own accord. At first I tried to read what I wrote as I produced it but that confused the writing process and I had no alternative but to slip into a kind of sleep – sleep which I needed, in spite of the fact that the greater part of me had lain comatose upon my bed for hours. I do not remember finishing my task, nor what I did for an hour or more after ceasing to write. I made no conscious decision to obey Lugard's injunction to seal one of the four documents I had transcribed in an envelope without attempting to read it, but when I came to my senses I found that already done.

"It was obvious even then that the return of my timeshadow had not restored my body to its former condition. It is possible that my present appearance represents a kind of adjustment, a stabilizing adaptation to whatever changes in my being were wrought by Lugard's nanozoons. I am not as close to death as I may appear, although my strength and powers of endurance are much reduced. My thought-processes remain clear and my powers of deduction do not seem in the least impaired.

"I told my loyal friend what Copplestone had told me and gave him Lugard's rival account to read – but his imagination had its limits, and when his mind reached those limits it balked. He told me, frankly, that his considered medical opinion was that if I could not set my delusions aside then I would certainly go mad. I know that madmen are generally reckoned to be incapable of perceiving their own madness, but I was satisfied as to my own sanity, and I was sure that if I were sane the experience I had undergone could not have been a fantasy *entirely* of my own invention. I was prepared to accept that it might not be true in every last detail, but I was certain that there was *some* truth in it, and that it had arrived there by very mysterious means."

By this time, Flammarion had begun to look uneasy, as if he were half-convinced that he was in the presence of a maniac. Had it not been for the perfect equanimity of Gourmont politeness might have lost its grip on him – but our host was still listening meekly and Flammarion did not want to offend against the rules of hospitality.

I, on the other hand, was as firmly convinced as the narrator that there was *some* truth in what he was telling us – but I did not know what kind of truth it was. The sanest – and hence the safest – conclusion was that it was the truth of the pseudonymous Sherinford's naked soul: the revelation of his paradoxical magnificence as a man and as a legend. Had I been in Gourmont's place, or Flammarion's, I would not have hesitated before plumping for that conclusion – and I did not doubt that they would do exactly that if they were kind enough not to reject the whole tale as facile nonsense – but I was not in their place. I had been in their place when I listened to Copplestone's tale, but I was in Lugard's place now.

I could hear the song of the sirens, and had no Orpheus to hand to drown them out. I was dying and damned, free to ignore the demands of sanity. In public, I still had to maintain my mask, but deep in my inner being – if only there were some secret region of it not yet racked and ruined by the pox – my powers of dream and desire were undiminished and undiminishable. I was prepared to desire with all my heart that every word of it *might* be true. I was even prepared to hope that the future it described – no matter that it was steeped in ice and poison, and the black blood of the dead – might be the future of destiny, as real as the horrid wallpaper which decorated the walls of my final prison.

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"I have the other scripts which Lugard consigned to my care in this case," Death's double informed us. "You may inspect them at your leisure if you so desire. It will be quicker, however, if I summarize Lugard's side of the argument just as I have summarized Copplestone's, and with your permission that is what I propose to do."

Outside, it was the quietest part of the night. Inside, the candles had burned low. The world beyond Gourmont's windows was silent and dark, already pregnant with the distant dawn – but the world within those boundaries was gravid still with mystery and melodrama.

"A summary will be quite adequate," Gourmont assured the story-teller.

"Quite adequate," Flammarion echoed, dutifully.

Jarry's dissenting voice was conspicuously half-hearted. "Vous avez plus de patience..." he said, leaving the sentence incomplete. I judged that he was telling himself – as the others must also have been – that even if all this were no more than a mad delusion, it was more interesting than any delusion into which a madman had previously fallen.

"Lugard's account of the end of the Earth did not differ significantly from Copplestone's," the detective immediately went on. "Indeed, I could not find any part of his account which contradicted Copplestone's as to

matters of fact. Where they differed was in the extra information Lugard was anxious to add, and in matters of judgment which challenged Copplestone's interpretations.

"The first important point of difference regarded the entity whose passage through the borders of the solar system had launched the Hail of Hell. At first, Lugard agreed, the overmen were inclined to believe that the great disaster was accidental, caused by some wayward mote of cosmic debris. Many among them soon began to wonder, however, whether the object might have been launched on its collision course deliberately, accelerated by technological means so that it would achieve a relative velocity close to that of light as it approached the sun. In brief, they became anxious that what had brought them to the brink of extinction had been a kind of cannonball, launched with the deliberate intention of wreaking such havoc within the overmen's solar system as to render their homeworld uninhabitable – but if the earth had been murdered, who could have done it, and why?

"The likeliest answer, the anxious overmen concluded, was that the exploratory quest on which they had innocently embarked had already been begun by other beings, which did not care to share it.

"Despite the awesome size of the universe which the overmen had discovered, they had calculated that their self-replicating probes could reach its limits within a tiny fraction of its own timespan. Having done that, their little instruments might set about whatever work they were commanded to do, while replicating themselves indefinitely in every sector of expanding space. In principle, at least, these instruments were capable of acquiring dominion over every atom of mass that existed. If someone wanted to stop them acquiring such dominion, the individuals in question presumably had plans to claim the dominion for themselves and to use it for their own ends.

"According to Lugard, the suspicious overmen reasoned that the ultimate aim of exploration had to be the conversion of the sum of all the matter in the universe into a single vast machine which, if it were allowed to develop unhindered, would eventually become the engine of the universe and the arbiter of its fate. Such a machine would have the power to determine the future not merely of itself but of the space-time continuum: to determine whether the expansion of space would continue indefinitely, or achieve stability, or reverse itself in such a way that the cycle of cause and effect would be completed.

"This was the prize which the most ambitious and the most fearful among the overmen considered to be at stake in the contest which, unwittingly, they had joined.

"While their existence had been calm and comfortable the overmen had cultivated equanimity. They had been content with a limited kind of immortality which left them vulnerable to accidental injury. After the Hail of Hell had fallen they were no longer content to accept any kind of mortality; they wanted *safety*, and history had shown them that the only true safety was absolute safety. When they decided that their stationary Arks must be the launching-pads for a new endeavour, in which the overmen would become explorers and

exploiters of the universe in person, their intention was to become components of the ultimate machine: the Universal Engine. Many of them considered it inevitable that they would not be allowed to win that privilege without fighting for it, and that they must be prepared for war. As they remade themselves in a host of new images, which gave greater priority to the inorganic at the expense of the organic, they armed themselves formidably.

"The overmen determined that their ultimate descendants must not only contrive an eventual reversion of the expansion of the universe but supervise its ensuing collapse most carefully. They came to believe that the primal explosion which seemed to them, looking backwards in time, to be the Moment of Creation must also be the Terminus of Space and Time.

Alpha, these bold philosophers asserted, must also be Omega; only thus could they make sense of the fact that the eternal and infinite universe appeared from within to have both a beginning and a boundary. All this, according to Lugard, the majority of the overmen took for granted – but there was one crucial question that still remained to exercise their minds. Given that the cycle could be completed – that the universe could and must be provided with an engine which would ensure that its end would be its beginning – did that also, and necessarily, imply that the universe could never be altered?"

"Surely this reasoning is more convoluted than it need be!" Flammarion objected. "If the expanding universe could, as you suggest, be forced to collapse again, thus returning to the state it was in when the expansion of space began, we can easily imagine an infinite series of explosions and collapses, following one another in sequence like the pulsations of a great heart."

The detective shook his fleshless head sadly.

"I must admit to some conceptual difficulty of my own," he said, "but according to the manuscript the overmen would not countenance talk of more than one universe, considering *that* to be a basic contradiction in terms. They were adamant that the Crucial Moment which had to be shaped by their Universal Engine had to be the moment of its beginning *as well as* its end, and that the universe which would result from its expansion must be *this* universe. They asserted that if the Universal Engine were to be able to make any alteration in the Crucial Moment that would determine a pattern of expansion different from the one which had led inexorably to the state of affairs with which they were familiar, the resultant universe would not exist *after* this one but *instead of it*. In brief, any alteration generated by the Universal Engine would utterly

cancel out its own history."

"That is exactly what I mean," said Flammarion. "A paradox would be generated. The situation is inconceivable!"

"I might have agreed with you once," the detective replied. "But the more I pondered the contents of Lugard's manuscript the more sympathetic I became to its argument. If the manuscript has the merest hint of truth in it, you see, we are forced to the conclusion that the past and the future *can* interact with one another. If my first vision really had established contact with the future, history had *already* been altered by virtue of my receipt of the new version of Copplestone's formula. The more I thought about it, the more reason there seemed to be to take the anxieties that Copple-

stone had voiced in 1895 seriously. Paradox or not, if there is *any* truth in my visions then history *can* be

rewritten, and events already experienced can be cancelled out, banished to some unfathomable oblivion. If that can happen on a parochial scale, then it can also happen on a cosmic scale: the conclusion is inescapable.

"Copplestone had assured me that the overmen were not opposed to his project, but Lugard must have been unconvinced. He believed that some of the overmen, at least, were prepared to accept that their own existence might be a phantom of possibility which yet remained in need of firm causation – and that just as they were quietly arming themselves for a war in the vast reaches of space, so they had to be making ready for a war that might range across time."



'THEY MET OTHERS.'



Even Gourmont bowed his head before that statement, and I heard Jarry laugh quietly.

Although I had never met Jarry I knew something of his theory of art. According to reliable rumour, he considered that attempting to *make sense* in the construction of a story or a drama was to submit to an undesirable tyranny. In his view, an artist had to defy logic itself if he was to be truly creative and wholly responsible for his creations; he must not allow himself to be yoked and driven by the implacabilities of mathematics and the uniform impositions of physics but must reach out to grasp the freedom of a *pataphysics* which would have no truck with laws of any kind. Had Jarry not been such a young man, he might have seen Sherrinford's story in the same light as myself – but for now, he only felt able to laugh with mingled delight and contempt.

If Death's double heard the laugh, he ignored it.

"Having imagined the Universal Engine, and having concluded that a contest to determine its shaping must eventually develop, if it had not already begun, they were enthusiastic to make it their own project without delay or distraction. It was not long before they met others engaged upon exactly the same task. Because the Others whom they met were very enthusiastic to declare themselves friends instead of rivals no immediate conflict ensued – but behind the facade of amity suspicion continued to fester, poisoning the attitude of the overmen all the more profoundly by virtue of its concealment.

"The Others told the overmen that their own solar system had been devastated in the same way as Earth's, by a similarly mysterious visitation, with the result that they too had concluded that planets were fit for no other purpose than to be graves for the primitive dead. They suggested, however, that there was no more reason to lament the deaths of those felled by the Hail of Hell than there was to lament the extinction of the ancestor-species which had to make way for intelligent descendants. They likened solar systems to eggshells which had to be cracked in order to allow the embryonic beings within to grow to maturity, or to placentas from which the healthy infants had to be cut loose.

"According to their own account, the Others had abandoned their home system in order to embark upon a great quest exactly as the overmen had, but their fervour was not so narrowly fixated on the completion of the circle of Alpha and Omega. They saw their mission rather differently. They argued that the construction of a Universal Engine could not possibly be the individual work of any single line of post-organic descent – it would, of necessity, be the collaborative work of them all. They argued that the most important aspect of that Engine's functioning was not the completion of the Universe but the perfection of the Universe in advance of that completion.

"Their version of the great quest effectively took the union of Omega and Alpha for granted, concentrating its attention on the making of a Paradise which might endure for millions or billions of years before the universe reached the limit of its expansion."

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"The alien aether-dwellers proposed to the pilgrim overmen that they need have no fear of their own extinction, because whatever became of them their eventual resurrection by the omnicompetent Universal Engine was already guaranteed. All beings which had ever existed – including, by implication, humankind – were guaranteed such resurrection when the Universal Engine attained the power to examine its own genesis. Then, and only then, would it become necessary and desirable to plan for the world beyond Heaven: the alchemical wedding of Omega and Alpha.

"The far-ranging overmen were advised by their new neighbours that they would do better to devote themselves to the widest exploration of possible modes of material existence, in order that they might discover and evaluate the entire spectrum of conceivable states of being. That, according to the Others, was the proper mission of all sentient beings.

"According to Lugard, the consensus that the sur-

viving overmen had formed in the wake of the solar system's devastation already concealed many differences of outlook, and the advent of the Others was a catalyst which caused those differences to become acute. Although some of the pilgrims thought that the Others really could be reckoned angelic bearers of glad tidings others considered them demonic tempters – enemies more dangerous in their own way than the celestial bludgeon which had launched the Hail of Hell. A few came to the conclusion that the whole purpose of these false friends was to distract the pilgrims from their mission and thus betray them to ultimate oblivion.

"Although they appeared to have no hostile intentions some thought the Others wolves in sheep's clothing – and some thought that they were merely instruments of some other set of entities as yet unglimped. These had become firmly convinced that there must be hidden forces at work in the universe – although not yet gifted with unambiguous existence therein – whose purpose was to make sure that the Universal Engine would produce an Alpha very different from the one implied by present-day observations.

"An equally extreme anxiety appeared among those overmen who believed that the Others were indeed their allies and not their secret enemies. These proposed that if there were hidden forces at work, they must be working at a more fundamental level, intending to produce in place of the presently-perceptible universe a new one in which the advent of any organic or mechanical life would be impossible: a universe fit only for immaterial intelligences of an incalculable nature.

"One consequence of this maëlstrom of anxieties, Lugard alleged, was that some of the overmen who had previously been uninterested in their extinct human cousins now began to think again about the mysteries of human nature and the possible utility of the art of casting timeshadows and had renewed their interest in what their human guests were doing – but not openly. Lugard felt that he understood the nature and depth of the overmen's anxieties far better than Copplestone did, and he was sure that they were taking care to conceal the nature and extent of their interest in Copplestone's project.

"While Copplestone had been making his plans, Lugard had been more intent on recovering what little remained of the human heritage – not merely its wisdom but its art and artefacts. While Copplestone had seeded the derelict Earth with watchful nanozoons he had set machines to conduct archaeological excavations, searching for anything and everything that the overmen of Earth had not contrived to remove into their underground Arks. Just as the overmen who remained in the solar system had helped Copplestone, so they had helped Lugard – doubtless, as he thought, with a similar hidden purpose.

"As I read all this, I realized that Lugard might have misjudged Copplestone – or might have judged him accurately but carefully kept his judgment to himself. If the overmen supporting Copplestone were keeping secrets from him, and Copplestone knew it, then Copplestone might be keeping secrets from them – secrets which he dared not reveal to me, knowing that his

every word might be overheard. Perhaps Copplestone and Lugard were not really adversaries at all, but merely men who dared not become overt collaborators for fear of alarming their anxious masters. If so, a different interpretation might be put on Copplestone's seemingly straightforward account of the mission he had asked me to undertake.

"Copplestone had told me that he could not think in terms of attempting to reverse the historical disasters which had overtaken humankind, but he would hardly have been allowed by the overmen to do otherwise. He had laid before me a plan to which the overmen could have no objection, and which might incidentally serve their own ends, but it was possible that he harboured secret hopes for a very different outcome to his experiment. By the same token, Lugard might have been even more indiscreet had he had a freer hand. His manuscript contained no explicit injunction urging me to publicize the existence in our own time of the secret vampires, nor any suggestion that we might raise an army to make war against them, but his suggestion that the overmen assisting him had secret motives of their own for so doing *might* be a hint that his own true motives were secret. Perhaps Lugard's real hope was that I might be able to precipitate exactly such a war.

"I wondered briefly why Lugard had not written his manuscripts in some kind of code that would have concealed their meaning from prying eyes, but I realized that to do so would inevitably have attracted attention. Remembering that final image which had impressed itself upon me as my vision ended, I had to conclude that he might have invited too much dark suspicion even with what he had written. I think that we ought to read his work with a determination to see what is written *between the lines*."



I could not have agreed with him more. Alas, there remains after all possible analysis nothing but a blank space between the lines of any script; what we find there is what we import. Every writer worthy of the name, of course, wants us to read *something* between his lines, but even the wisest and wittiest knows that his readers retain the freedom to import all manner of illusion into that kind of reading.

"I had lamented more than once," Death's double continued, "that so many of the questions I had wanted to ask in the course of my visions had remained unvoiced. Now I began to wonder whether any answers I might have been given could possibly have been honest. What I had been told by my two informants was astonishing – but the possibilities opened up by the suspicion that they had not been able to speak freely were even more astounding.

"Lugard did take leave to suggest in his manuscript that the flesh/machine hybrids which set out to fill the whole of the universe might better be called predators than pilgrims. Their mission, as he represented it, was to *consume* all the matter in the universe, to integrate it into their increasingly versatile bodies. Their initial intention, on meeting other material beings engaged in a similar expansion, was to obliterate and consume

them as their vampire ancestors had obliterated and consumed humankind when the opportunity arose, and they had hesitated over that course only because they were not sure of success.

"Lugard was insistent – perhaps hypocritically – that in saying this he did not mean to denigrate the new overmen; he regarded theirs as the natural attitude of any successful species. He implied – perhaps deceptively – that his own view coincided with those overmen and Others who accepted that the only real enemies they had were creatures of a fundamentally different kind: creatures to whose existence the laws of matter were inimical but which nevertheless retained a tenuous hold on existence.

"What Lugard actually proposes in the manuscript that I transcribed is that Copplestone's ambition to repopulate the Earth is too trivial to be worthy of the attention of serious men. He suggests that any individual capable of casting a timeshadow ought not to aim for the kind of fixative reconstruction that he and Copplestone achieved, but should instead set his sights on the most distant future attainable. 'Humans are possessed of a gift,' he says, 'but which makes them different from the other natural species known to me. I was content to trade that gift for those which the overmen had, but I was hasty. My advice to others is not to repeat my error, but to cultivate the best enlightenment of which human beings, through their timeshadows, are capable. I urge you, and all those you can recruit to your cause, not to aim for Copplestone's Utopia but to seek out the best news of the most distant future they can possibly attain.'

"Lugard admits that he is mapping out an expedition so dangerous that few men could hope to survive it, given that his version of the timeshadow formula is more toxic than Copplestone's as well as more potent. For most men, he concedes, the enterprise which he describes must be a suicide mission. Nor is there any guarantee that anyone who embarks upon it will be able to discover anything at all about the condition of the far future universe. He understands that Copplestone's modest proposal offers a more tangible and more easily attainable reward."

Death's double paused for a moment, to show that he was now finished with reportage, and then resumed speaking for himself.

"You can see with your own eyes what the experience of time-travel has done for me," he said. "You will understand that this is a direly dangerous business. All that I experienced was a dream, and I do not pretend otherwise. I cannot help but feel, though, that the mysteries inherent in these visions of mine must have some rational solution. I have racked my brains long and hard in the hope of finding some such solution, but all I have so far produced is a further crop of awkward possibilities.

"In the future of my dream, the overmen's descendants had not settled the question of whether the event which destroyed their civilization was an accident or an act of war. If the Hail of Hell was indeed the impact of a cosmic bullet, there are several possibilities unmentioned by either Copplestone or Lugard. Perhaps it will not be fired at the overmen but at humankind, eventually hitting the wrong target. On

the other hand, if time can indeed be tied in knots, perhaps it will somehow be fired by humankind, aimed to destroy those destined to usurp the human empire, thus to free the Earth for human repopulation. Bear in mind, too, that the overmen's descendants might have lied to Copplestone and Lugard about the manner in which human civilization had been destroyed. Even if they did not lie, it is possible that they might have been mistaken; forces unknown even to them might have been at work.

"All of this may be no more than a tissue of fantasies – but if there is *any* truth in what I have seen there are warnings which we really ought to heed. Our civilization may have less than two centuries in hand before its demolition. There may be secret predators lurking unseen in our midst. Time may not be immutable, and if it is not there may be some enemies close at hand and others further afield who stand to benefit from interference with our history. I am the living proof that the formulae I carry in my briefcase are dangerous to use; there is some reason to fear that they might be dangerous even to know. It is possible that I have placed you all in peril simply by telling you this story – a peril that will doubtless be increased should you condescend to believe it. For that, I am sorry – but if it is so, then the future of the human race really does depend on the story being told, and believed."

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Having added that epilogue to his tale the great man reached into his bag and produced an envelope, which he handed to me.

"I cannot say that I was not tempted to open it again," he said, "but I thought it best to do as I was asked. Doubtless you will be the best judge of whether its contents should be made known to anyone else."

He clearly expected me to open the envelope and read the letter aloud, so the spirit of perversity joined forces with my feebleness to make me put it away unopened. Alas, my hand was trembling so badly that I could hardly guide it into the inner pocket of my coat.

"Monsieur Melmoth can do no more tonight," Gourmont said to the detective, speaking from within his cloak of shadow with calm authority. "We must make sure that he gets safely home. Have you a carriage that Monsieur Melmoth might share, professor?"

"I have," replied Flammarion, rising to his feet, "but my coachman will be sound asleep by now."

"Shall we meet again, then?" the detective asked. "I need to hear your opinion of what I have told you. I need advice as to what I ought to do with the formulae."

Gourmont held up his hand to delay the astronomer's retreat. "I thank you for your trouble, Monsieur Sherrinford," he said to the detective. "You have laid before us a puzzle of such awesome intricacy that it can hardly be resolved in an hour by men as tired as we are. I suggest that we reassemble here tonight, at eight. Is that convenient for everyone?"

No time would have been "convenient" for me, and I suspected that the one named could not have suited Flammarion or Jarry very well, but neither raised a murmur of objection. With that appointment set, the detective had no further objection to our dispersal.

When Flammarion went down to see to his horses and carriage the detective went with him. Jarry stayed, so that he might lend me his shoulder when the time came for me to attempt the staircase. In the meantime, Gourmont offered further apologies for not having paid attention to my distress.

"Not at all," I said weakly. "I would not have missed it for the world. What else could have provided such a fine distraction from the tedious business of dying?"

"Un autre fou furieux," muttered Jarry.

"You should not say that," Gourmont chided him. "There is little of interest to be found in the ravings of a lunatic, and what we have heard tonight is certainly not uninteresting."

Jarry raised a sceptical eyebrow but would not insult his friend by asking him whether he believed what he had heard.

Gourmont answered the question anyway. "I do not doubt for a moment that what we have heard was an honest report of an actual experience. As to the nature of the experience..."

He paused reflectively, then continued carefully, while Jarry and I listened with due respect.

"We live in a literate age. We take our books so much for granted that we have quite forgotten what it was to live without them. Among the illiterate peasants of Normandy and Provence there is some relic of oral culture, but it has lost its authority over their minds and their lives. Nowadays, those who cannot read are merely ignorant – but in the days when no one could read, and the only measure of wisdom was what men carried in their heads, everyone knew what everyone had to know. All information was public property, including myths and legends, fantasies and folktales. Fiction, no less than fact, was the property of the tribe.

"In our new world, things work very differently. We have delegated the business of remembrance to our books; what we cannot carry in our heads we can easily *look up*. Wisdom now lies more in knowing what authorities to consult, and in the reliable interpretation of what they have to say, than in the wealth of experience. The records we keep have increased our wealth of facts immeasurably, and our wealth of fictions too, but they have allowed that wealth to be divided and privatized. There is private property in fantasies and folktales just as there is in science and law. Nowadays, even myths and legends have authors; every man can be his own myth-maker, a compiler of private legends.

"In the past, visions of the future were public property in exactly the same fashion as memories. Each tribe had its own pattern of anticipation, just as it had its own history. In the 20th century, on whose threshold we stand, the last remnants of those patterns will disintegrate, no matter how hard their inheritors may fight to hold them together. The expectations of old will fragment, and the images held in place by collective fears and collective hopes will give way to promiscuous confusion. Even as little as a hundred years ago France and the world had but a few futures, but in a hundred years' time there will be such a profusion of futuristic visions as we can hardly imagine. That, my friends, is progress.

"What we have just heard, I believe, is an archetype of future visions to come. It is an *individual myth* of

considerable colour and complexity, wonderfully ambitious and inextricably convoluted. Monsieur Sherrinford, being the kind of man he is, confines himself while confronting his vision to one question: *is there truth in it?* He is so narrowly confined that even though his vision has given him the answer, he cannot accept it. That answer is of course, negative. There can be no secure truth in *any* vision of the future, for the simple reason that if there *were* truth in some such vision, it would be self-negating. If we knew what the future held, we would be free to exercise our power of choice to accept its desirable aspects and reject its undesirable ones, thus cancelling out our knowledge. Monsieur Sherrinford has done his level best to construct a myth in which such cancellations might be accommodated, in which the history of the universe might be continually reconstructed. In his myth, Alpha and Omega may touch and change places, so that eternity dissolves into a flickering dance in which nothing can ever be finally realized. Such is the mind-set of the consulting detective: nothing is ever what it appears to be, and even if it is, it cannot be trusted to remain so.

"We three are men of a different kind, are we not? We are, of course, men in search of our own myths, but so is every man whether he is an artist or not. What distinguishes *our* cause is the quest for deeper insight, for brighter beauty... and above all else, for that which can command and compel the imaginative consent of our fellow men. We are aristocrats of the mind, are we not?"

I did not doubt that he believed it, any more than I doubted that Death's double believed his own account. With just a little effort, I might have believed it myself – but I did not make the effort. I was too tired. Belief was beyond my scope, for the moment. On the morrow, I would doubtless rediscover exactly what it was I intended to believe, but for the moment I could only disappoint Gourmont by my lack of reaction.

He accepted the disappointment like the gentleman he was. By way of tawdry compensation, Jarry murmured "C'est vrai," and may even have meant it.

Flammarion reappeared, signalling that he was ready to depart. He and Jarry helped me down the stairs and into the carriage. The night air had a touch of frost in it, which had the effect of reviving me a little.

"I think I shall believe it, after all," Jarry told me, as he stepped back. He had taken care to rehearse the English words, but he spoke with a little too much ostentation. "It demands belief, because it is incredible, because it... because men like us must overcome fear of paradox, fear of exception. It is our mission, is it

not?"

I did not know whether I still had a mission, in life or beyond it. I did not know – but I nodded as gracefully as I could and the young man went off contentedly to fetch his bicycle.

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Flammarion produced a small flask which must have been in the charge of his coachman, and offered it to me. I drank; it was only brandy, but brandy was infinitely preferable to water.

"Merci," I said.

As we drove away Jarry – now mounted on his ridiculous machine – raised his hand in a salute.

"You should not have come, Monsieur Melmoth," Flammarion said gravely. "The other has something burning in him which makes him strong; with you, I think, it is the other way around.

He should not have demanded that you bear witness to his extravagance. It was unnecessary. That one strange fact may be established cannot prove the whole, and it is certain that he is very ill. Fever has strange effects on a brilliant mind."

"On the contrary," I replied. The brandy had revived me sufficiently to allow me to continue, albeit without any real flamboyance. "I am in his debt. Dying is an ignominious business, and those who decay before they die are doubly afflicted. A dying man who would not give his fortune for a spark of amazement would be a wretched miser." I congratulated myself silently on the achievement of this speech, and wondered if I had the strength to make another.

No candle had been lit within the carriage, but Flammarion must have sensed my predicament.

"Yes," he said pensively, "I suppose we are fortunate to have heard such a story – such a vision! I am a man of science, and I know that my duty is always to ask *is it true?* but I am a visionary myself, and I know that it is never enough to ask *is it a fact?* I am a stargazer, appointed to record the motions of the stars with mathematical exactitude and to analyse the spectra of their radiance with scrupulous precision, but the universe is not the sum of all this data, heaped up like a miser's hoard. The universe is an hypothesis, a created image; it is not the data but their implication. As an observer I see only the merest fraction of the present state of things, but as a visionary I infer the whole from its parts, the past from its relics, the future from its seeds.

"I suspect that you do not think as highly of Edgar Poe in England as we do in France, but you must have read his account of the mesmeric revelation, and his description of an experiment in which the consciousness of a dying man was preserved by mesmeric instruction and commissioned to report on the exis-



"...RAISED HIS HAND IN A SALUTE."

tence beyond death. We should not mistake these fictions for facts, but we would be fools to say that there is nothing in them of precious implication. We have become overly respectful of the *brutality* of facts; we have elevated them to be icons not because we hold them sacred but because we have consented to be bullied into submission to their unadorned certainty. We are in danger of strangling the imagination, choking the very life out of our conception of the world. Do I mean *conception*, or *concept*?"

"You mean *conception*," I assured him.

I knew that I was right, just as Gourmont had been right about individual myths and the impeding proliferation of visions of the future. Flammarion meant that the world is *born* of our thoughts and visions, gifted by them with independent life and the power of growth. We do not create it by any conscious invention – its ultimate genesis lies far beyond the reach of our petty dabblings – but we do conceive it, and bring its embryo to term. I decided that I liked Flammarion as well as I liked Gourmont. It would be hard to leave a world which had such men within it. It would be easy too – horribly and despicably easy – but it would be hard in the sense of the word which is implied by the term *hard labour*. It would be cruel, annihilating, and in the end unendurable.

"You must not come to Gourmont's house tomorrow," the astronomer said. "We ought to come to you, if we desire to know what is written in that piece of paper you carry in your pocket."

"Certainly not," I replied, trying with all my might not to sound hoarse. "I am merely dying; no harm can possibly come to me. If I meet a man to whom I was once kind and he cuts me dead, or expresses disgust at my distress, it cannot hurt me. Gourmont is alive; he must be protected. If I cannot come, you will have to do without me – but I will send the letter. I will not hold anything back which might leave the tale incomplete."

He was silent for a few moments while he contemplated that reply, but he was not so impolite as to contradict me. After a while, he reverted to his former theme.

"If it *were* a fact," he said softly, "it would not be too terrible to bear. All men must die, and the human species cannot endure forever. The vital matter is not our flesh but our souls; they endure, and the universe is open to their action and their contemplation. We can only measure the temporary against the metre of the eternal; we can only understand limits because they are set against the backcloth of the infinite. We have as many lives to live as are provided for in the universal imagination, and as many paradises to discover. I cannot agree with those sceptics who say that we have had too many revelations, which have given birth to far too many jealous creeds. I say that we have not had revelations enough, that our creeds might learn to be humble. We must never deny facts, but we must never be content with them. We should rejoice that the facts we discover day by day by means of our telescopes and microscopes are more wonderful by far than the narrow faiths of our forefathers, but we should not rest content with them, nor should any man attempt to squeeze the wonder out of them. Monsieur Sherrinford may be ill, but he is not an imbecile. His fervour to

escape the hospital may have taken him further from the world than was necessary or desirable, but what a voyage it was!"

"Exactly so," I said. I had enough strength in reserve to say a little more, but we had turned the final corner and the Hôtel d'Alsace was ahead of us; I thought it best to hoard my resources in order that I might withstand the storm of Dupoirier's anxious criticism.



It was a wise decision. The storm in question was a severe test. I should not have gone out; I should not have stayed so late; I must not go out again; I must be closely watched from now on, by Reggie or Robbie or anyone fool enough to do it; I must follow the doctor's instructions to the letter; I must take my medicine on time; I must not get cold; I must not excite myself...

The dying, alas, lose their adulthood. It is not that they become children in the eyes of their loved ones, but rather that they enter a distinct phase of being, burdened with a particular horror which others desperately wish to alleviate but cannot actually share. Whatever effect the spectre of death may have on the dying, it inevitably renders onlookers helpless; it disturbs them so profoundly that they become incapable of ordinary adult intercourse.

I took to my bed, as instructed. I took my medicines, as instructed. I slept till noon – and having woken for a little while, to take elementary nourishment, I slept again.

All the while, the envelope which the great detective had give me rested in the inner pocket of my coat. It was four o'clock before I mustered the resolve to rip it open – but I had not time to turn resolve into accomplishment. I was interrupted by a visitor who cut through Dupoirier's objections like a razor wielded by the infamous barber of Fleet Street.

It was, of course, my very own vision of Death.

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"How kind of you to call," I said, wishing that I had had time to powder my face. If he was the living image of the notorious Opera Ghost, I was the living image of Edgar Poe's Red Death; our juxtaposition was not without an element of melodramatic irony, but I would rather have confronted him on a less equal basis.

"I fear that I asked too much of you last night," he said. "I should have seen that you were not up to it."

"I am touched by your solicitude," I assured him.

As soon as Dupoirier had been dismissed he brought a chair to the bedside and sat down. He looked around; I could see that even he found the wallpaper offensive.

"They did not believe a word of it," he said plaintively. "Even you think that it is a figment of my imagination, do you not? Although I am party to information only you and Lugard knew, you believe that it is nothing but a fever dream."

"Even when one has eliminated the impossible," I told him, "one is invariably confronted with a tangle of possibilities; fate is never so kind as to leave just one. According to your own testimony, and that of the manuscript, you met and talked with Lugard before his death. No one could accept that script you gave to me

as proof of communication from beyond the grave, given that the information *could* have been passed from one living man to another. No one, that is, except me. I accept it, not because it is proven but because I no longer have any incentive to deny it."

He looked long and hard at me then. Flammarion was right; whatever else he was, he was no fool.

"No," I said, "it is not that I am so desperate in the face of imminent annihilation that any thread of hope would do. Had you come back with only one of your formulae I could not be half as fascinated. Even if neither of your drugs is anything more than poison the choice of one or other of them would still be meaningful. Every man ought to have the opportunity to choose his own brand of poison, in order to say: *this* is the future to which I am committed; *this* is what I stand for; *this* is what I amount to; *this* is what I *was*."

My voice had sunk to a whisper as I made this declaration, but I should like to think that its sinking had added a certain dramatic effect.

"Then we are both mad," he said, "and neither one of us is alone."

I took the first as a compliment, the second as a friendly gesture.

"You will find the letter in my coat," I said. "I am sorry to have to ask you to give it to me for a second time, but I am undressed."

He got up without a word, and fetched the envelope. Then he fetched a paper-knife from the dressing-table and handed it to me. I slit the envelope and took the letter out. I did not read it aloud. How could I resist the temptation to torture him? It is the duty of every man to make his passage through this vale of tears as memorable as possible – and how can he do that, unless he is capable of *exceptional* unkindness?

The letter read:

My dear Oscar,

By now you have read the account of our shared adventure which I displayed to our mutual friend. It is overlong, I know, but it was written without any thought that it might be relayed back in time, as an *aide memoire*. When a man discovers that he might live for thousands of years he can easily become fearful that he might forget the life he led when he was a mere mortal, and thus forget *himself*. I sometimes suspect that Copplestone had forgotten himself, without even suspecting it.

You will not have been surprised to hear that Copplestone and I are adversaries in this desolate but wonderful future, nor that he has appointed himself to a saintly role and me to a satanic one. I know that you approved of him, and I can assure you that I still share your approval, but he is too *earnest*. The burdens of responsibility weigh heavily upon him, slowing his

intellectual progress.

My experiment in suicide brought me to a future in which Copplestone still enjoyed a measure of celebrity but I did not rush to his side on the assumption that because we were the only two human beings alive we must behave as brothers. The overmen were diverse even in those days, and those who helped in my remaking were not closely allied with those who had adopted him. If they had not been rivals before my advent, they became rivals afterwards, in the quest to discover the secrets of time travel. It proved to be a fruitless quest, but that did not make their rivalry any less; if anything, it was intensified.

I have nothing to say about my substitute Laura or the failure of my attempt to bring her into my afterlife; you would think me silly and tedious if I dwelt on mere emotional matters. You will know as well as

I that the example of her death proves that adventures such as mine are not free of risk. For some humans, at least, death is death. If the alien angels can be believed, that will

not matter, because the Universal Engine will resurrect all the beings that ever lived into their own particular paradises in that languorous Indian Summer of existence which will precede the Omega Moment – but I cannot believe what the Others say. I cannot even believe that they believe it.

I do not know exactly what Copplestone told our mutual friend, nor what he really believes, but I suspect that their ingrained scepticism will not let either man believe in the loving resurrection promised by the alien angels. To accept such a creed would be to accept as a given

that the ultimate future of mankind is secure. It is not, nor can it ever be. Perhaps there will be men on earth who will answer Copplestone's call to build a New Jerusalem. I hope that there are, for our rivalry is not of the sort that makes me anxious to see him fail. He is the saint, not I; his is the kind of jealous faith that cannot abide heresy, while mine is a generous philosophy which thrives on dialogue. It is not selfishness which commands me to advise you to seek a different fate, nor is it a matter of principle. It is simply that you still have something that Copplestone and I have not: the ability to cast a timeshadow, and the chance to cast it where no timeshadow has ever been cast before.

Even if this were paradise, or there were some other paradise of which I could be certain, I would still say: *do not come here*. We are here already and our dream is already set in stone; if there are further futures to be found and further dreams to be dreamed, they must be your aim. If you yearn for a paradise, far better that you should make one anew than seek to enter one already made.

I have not become bored with the prospect of eternity



'MY VERY OWN VISION OF DEATH.'

which faces me. The life I have lived since my death in 1895 has been delightful. Even though I came to it alone, and lived through a uniquely harrowing time when the civilization of the overmen was smashed and the Earth destroyed, I have found my afterlife well worth living. I remain avid to meet every challenge that the next 10,000 years might throw up. The frustration which sometimes steals upon me is neither *ennui* nor *spleen*, but simply the knowledge that I am one man, with one existence to lead. If I were asked to sum up what 16,000 years of life have taught me in a single paragraph, it would be this: *No matter how far a man's neighbour may see into the wilderness of infinity, he must try to see further. No matter how kind a destiny a man's neighbour may identify, he must search for a different one.*

In my dark heart, I cannot believe that the universe is as gentle and generous a place as the alien angels assert, and I am suspicious of their motives for asserting it. If my suspicions are correct, it is imperative that men capable of looking into the far future should continue to search and interrogate its perverse manifold of possibilities – but even if I am wrong, is not mine the more apt prescription, the more glorious adventure?

It is my belief that the future is as yet unmade, and that the past is not as safe as it seems from the comfortable vantage of the present. *All* is undetermined, and its determination is and always will be a *contest*. No man should ever hope that he and the universe are safe in the grip of an unalterable destiny; he surely ought to hope that the world – including the Omega and Alpha of the universe – is infinitely variable, and that it will indeed vary, eternally!

You will already know why I have asked our mutual friend to deliver this missive directly to you. It is not because I do not trust him to state my side of the case and to state it fairly; I know that he will be conscientious in preserving the other documents which I dictated to him, and in making them available to anyone to whom they might be of use. It is because you are the person best fitted by fate to sympathize with my cause and best placed by merit to further it. By now, I estimate, you will have been recognized as the greatest genius of your generation; if there is any justice in the world your followers must be legion. You will know what to do with the formula, and I hope and trust that you will have the authority to do it.

Yours in eternal friendship,
Lugard.



When I had finished reading the letter I handed it back to the man who had delivered it. When he too had read Lugard's epistle Death's double raised his fleshless head to fix me with his glittering stare.

"Nothing new," he said bleakly.

He was not surprised. He had not expected that Lugard would express himself more freely, or more explicitly, in this document than in the one he had already read and summarized. He had already explained that what was to be read in any message from a jealous future had to be read *between* the lines.

"Nothing new," I agreed.

In fact, though, there was something new – but it was addressed to me and me alone. The real significance of the letter was not what it said but the simple fact of its existence.

Everything else the detective had offered to my consideration, including the record of my private conversations contained in *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires*, he could and might have compiled by non-supernatural means – but a detective would have been content with the longer manuscript. The letter was excess to requirements, beautifully superfluous.

It had to be authentic. It had to be Lugard's. Which meant that the detective's vision had to be true, in every aspect that mattered.

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My visitor remained silent while he raised the courage to ask for my advice. In the end, he said: "I have thought of publishing everything – throwing it randomly into the public arena, so that those who might find hope or challenge in it might do as they pleased. The doctor advised me against doing so. I suspect that Gourmont and Flammarion will say the same."

"I have never been one to attach myself to majorities," I said judiciously, "but in this instance I must agree with your other advisors. I doubt that the authorities would approve of your printing recipes for dangerous drugs. In any case, promiscuous publication would be more likely to inhibit belief in your tale than to encourage it."

"Even so," he whispered, "I must somehow make the formulae known and command respect for them – and I must do it quickly."

"Why quickly?" I asked.

"I still remember how anxious Copplestone was to discover whether the future he had glimpsed was the future of destiny or merely a contingency which might yet be cancelled out by deliberate action. He was concerned even then with the question of whether the extinction of the human race and its supersession by our vampire cousins was preventable – and he had begun to wonder, towards the end, whether that extinction might actually have been *caused* by his revelation to the inhabitants of the future that human beings had the ability to travel in time. That may be the real reason why he set machines to watch so carefully for the advent of any further adventurers, and why he required them to act as they did when one appeared. I fear that if I cannot make the truth known quickly I might somehow be prevented from making it known at all."

I would have replied to that, but he cut me off; he had a speech to make.

"You might suppose that even if I had not done so, someone else would eventually have duplicated Copplestone's researches and reproduced the drug, but I doubt it. The primitive tribes whose traditional knowledge Copplestone compounded are in the process of being wiped out by the march of progress. The Tasmanians and the Carib Indians are already extinct; others will doubtless follow them. Even where such tribes survive, their heritage will be eclipsed by science and the other systems of European thought. The secret will never be disclosed again if I cannot preserve it –

and I fear that what I have discovered might yet be rudely wrenched from my grasp and condemned to oblivion.

"It seems to me that as soon as entities with the power to alter the past discover the means to apply that power they will become emperors of time, able to submit past and future alike to their dictatorship – but no matter how powerful they become their empire will always remain fragile, as brittle as glass. Unless they are omniscient, such beings would never be able to be sure that no rival entities would emerge – whether in their own unknown future or in the re-unfolding past that they themselves had brought into being to secure their hegemony – which might achieve further alterations: alterations which, however trivial in themselves, might cancel out their very existence.

"Any such empire of time, I conclude, would have to be *policed* with the utmost vigilance, everywhere and everywhen, to make sure that wherever and whenever the power to twist time might emerge it could be nipped in the bud. But we know, do we not, that the universe is a vaster place by far than our fathers supposed? We know, too, that it is *older* by far than they supposed. Given this abundant scope, even the most efficient police force might be expected to take time to react – time which might subsequently be cancelled out, but time nevertheless experienced by the contemporaries of the entity which first attracted the attention of the emperors of time.

"Sanely or insanely, I can see no alternative but to conclude that we might in fact be living in exactly such a time: a brief interval between the event which marked our species for destruction and the execution of the sentence; a moment of history which is scheduled for demolition, but retains meanwhile a shadowy provisional existence. I conclude also that while the moment is as yet unannihilated, it must remain pregnant with the possibility that its future might yet be secured, obliterating in the process that other contingent future which is ambitious to exterminate it. If that is so, then the human race might yet be saved.

"On the other hand, if time and space really do constitute an empire, it *ought* to be policed and protected against dissolution into chaos – not for the sake of tyranny, but for the sake of freedom. The rules which bind matter, like the rules which bind society, ought not to be thought of as fetters restricting our free will; they are in fact the mechanisms by means of which our desires and ambitions might be fulfilled. If time is not inviolable, it ought to be. The idea that a man – or any alien being – might reach back in time to snuff out entire histories is not merely frightening but utterly repugnant. No benevolent Creator could permit it – and we cannot tolerate it."

"If that is true," I murmured, "our intolerance will not matter a jot, nor will our quickness."

He looked at me with an expression that no one else but Death could ever have worn.

"What should I do?" he asked. "I need to know."



I was not in any fit state to advise him, but I could not bring myself to refuse him, or even to instruct him to

come back when I had made up my mind. Fortunately, necessity is ever the mother of improvisation, and I was not found wanting.

"First of all," I said, "stop looking over your shoulder in fear of assassins from the future. If our history is indeed policed, you may be sure that the policemen are equipped with weapons far subtler than guns. If the protectors of the future want to be rid of you they will simply cancel you out of existence, no matter how quickly you act. They probably have the means to do so without causing overmuch disruption to the rest of us; they might do it simply by redefining you as a fiction instead of a fact – and you would never know the difference.

"Secondly, if you want to ensure that your formulae are not merely preserved but used, you must circulate them selectively and clandestinely. I am sufficiently democratic to disapprove of Copplestone's asking you to select only the best of men for possible advancement, but I am perfectly certain that very few would volunteer, even at the point of death. I am tempted to suggest that you peddle the drugs as hallucinogens, attempting to establish them as fashionable substitutes for opium and hashish, but that would violate the principle of informed consent – and any time-travellers thus recruited might be so much poorer than the average as to offend the most hardened democrat. There is only one sensible course open to you."

"Which is?" I think he knew, but he wanted to hear it from my lips.

"To form a secret society. They are very fashionable nowadays, even more so in Paris than in London. Clothe your secret in layers of mystery and deliberate flummery; that way you will make it seem seductive to those most likely to be useful to you, and harmless to those who disapprove. Hide your initiates within a crowd of mere charlatans, and trust to luck that enough good men will penetrate the periphery to find the heart of the enterprise. I fear that you will not obtain many Flammarions, but you might hope for a Gourmont or two. Now fold up that letter and put it in our pocket. You have my permission to take it to Gourmont's house and let him read it. I advise you to listen meekly to whatever he and his companions have to say to you, and to take every word of it seriously. Whatever you do thereafter, I hope you will not leave Paris without letting me know."

The man I had taken for Death stood up, and put the paper in his pocket, as I had commanded.

"Thank you," he said – but he made me no promises.

— 20 —

It is, I suppose, traditional that a wicked man on his deathbed should repent of his errors. I had more opportunity to repent of mine than I should have liked. Before October ended I told Robbie that my drama had lasted too long, and that I had reached my St Helena. I told him about the duel to which I had been challenged by my wallpaper but he thought me guilty of delirium; little did he know what was to come.

In November I was driven mad by an abscess in my ear, and driven madder by the meningitis which followed in its train. I told Robbie and Reggie while they were both in attendance that I had been supping with

the dead, but I did not tell them that we had dined on rich black blood. When Robbie had gone to Nice I suffered further bouts of ignominious incoherence, in the midst of which my plea that Reggie should send for Death passed quite unheeded.

When Robbie returned he was very anxious to fetch me a priest, and I could not prevent him. By the time the priest came I could no longer speak, and such gestures as I made with my hand were misconstrued. Even so, while the Passionist made haste to anoint and absolve me, I made what shift I could to formulate my own repentance and further my own salvation. While I framed this glorious confession I quite lost sight of Robbie and Reggie, and when I recovered myself I found myself alone and in darkness – but not for long.

I heard the door of my room open and footsteps crossing the carpet, but it was not until the gas was lit that I saw who my visitor was.

"Are you Death," I asked, "or merely his benign twin?"

He would not tell me. "Are you ready?" he said, instead.

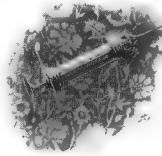
"More than ready," I assured him, knowing that the answer would do in either case.

It was not until he produced a hypodermic syringe from his briefcase that I had any real inkling which twin he was, and even then I could not be entirely certain. If the grim reaper must carry a briefcase nowadays instead of a scythe, then he must have his medical apparatus too. Death, like the living, has no option but to move with the times.

While my visitor filled his instrument from a glass vial marked with a skull and crossbones I looked at the wall behind him. As usual, the gaslight had brought out all the malignity of the false foliage and all the meretriciousness of those baleful flowers. They lay like a poisoned skin upon the wall and upon the world. Everything hateful was in them, everything that had blighted my life – but now I would have my revenge. They no longer had the power to hurt or contain me.

"I wish you luck" said Death, or his double, as he aimed his dart at my heart. "The past is already lost, the future yet to be found – but there may be work for you to do among the shifting sands of time."

"Never in the course of my hectic career," I murmured, bringing the half-forgotten thought to audible fruition at last, while the merciful needle slid into my flesh, "had I ever encountered flagitious wallpaper – until I came to this. The world and I have reached our final *impasse*, my friend. One of us must go."



Brian Stableford's most recent stories in these pages were "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires" (issues 91-92), "The Road to Hell" (issue 97), "The Serpent" (issue 99), "Sleepwalker" (issue 105) and "Worse than the Disease" (issue 113). His well-received "Creators of Science Fiction" series will resume in our next issue with essay number eight.



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Price increase

It's with regret that we raise the price of the magazine from £2.75 to £3 with effect from this issue (and for subscriptions by slightly lesser amounts *pro rata* – please note that it's always cheaper to subscribe). The reason is that we've been hit by a triple whammy in recent months – substantial postage hikes followed by increased printing and paper costs. This is our first price increase in nearly two years. However, for existing subscribers who renew their subs by **1st March 1997** we're holding the old subscription rates steady: so renew now (even if your sub has not yet expired) and avoid the increase!

Once upon a time when I first began to attend sf conventions, people would flock to see a thing called the *Star Trek* Blooper Reel, in which actors drolly fell over or got their lines wrong. (CAPTAIN KIRK: "OH FUCK!" audience: prolonged thigh-slapping hysterics extending into many minutes, they are going to hurt themselves, it is not good for them to laugh so much.) This cult attraction has spawned a million acclaimed successors – *Red Dwarf Smeg Outs* etc – on the same principle whereby postage stamps are infinitely more valuable if the Queen's ears have been printed upside down. So my latest sure-fire project for 1997 is the *Literary SF/Fantasy Out-Takes* video, capturing the whacky, zany lapses of the writers themselves. See Robert Holdstock go "Ouch" as he mis-researches an earthy rut scene for *Mythagos Forever!* [TITANIC CANNED LAUGHTER.] See Gene Wolfe scratch his head and mutter, "What the hell did I mean by that bit?" [GALES OF HILARITY.] See John Clute tergiversate! [HUGE BLAST OF CANNED HAECCEITY.] See Terry Pratchett absent-mindedly signing his lunch! [DEAFENING SHRIEKS OF MIRTH.] See Harlan Ellison prevented from completing *The Last Dangerous Visions* by amusingly having to change his antique typewriter ribbon! [SHORT BUT VERY LOUD BURST OF LAUGHTER.] See David Langford make three countem three stabs at correctly typing "Ansible"! [MASSIVE OUTBREAK OF DEAD SILENCE.] ... How can it fail to be a bestseller?

THE BIRD IS CRUEL

Stephen Baxter's launch party for *Voyage* at Forbidden Planet sounds decadent beyond belief: "The party went well. There was a huge book-shaped cake to celebrate a huge cake-shaped book. In my party bag from Dick Jude I found a Ken&Barbie Star Trek collectible; Barbie as Uhura is disturbingly sexy, those black tights... There was some competition from the *New Worlds* party at Murder One but a score draw was declared."

Michael Bentine (1921-1996), who died on 18 November, was fondly remembered by UK genre humorists for his surreal and fantastic comedy – first in the Goon Show team and later with such TV series as *It's a Square World*. In Terry Pratchett's words, "He married the Goons style to the old comedy traditions and was, I think, more consistently funny than, say, Python."

Charles L. Dodgson, that notoriously shifty author, was in fact Jack the Ripper – according to "child psychotherapist" Richard Wallace in a recent *Harper's* magazine. This follows from previously undiscovered anagrams in Lewis Carroll's work. For example, "Twas brillig ..." unravels as: *Bet I beat*

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

my glands til / With hand-sword I slay the evil gender. / A slimy theme; borrow gloves, / And masturbate the hog more! Er, isn't science wonderful?

Joe Haldeman cannot contain himself: "Frabjous day! My Hollywood agent just [November] sold the movie rights to *The Forever War* for \$365,000, to Boss Films!"

Liz Knights, the much-liked publisher at Gollancz who helped steer the company through two takeovers, died in mid-November from the cancer against which she had fought for some time. She was only 41.

Fritz Leiber did not leave vast archives of unpublished material (would that we could say the same of L. Ron Hubbard). But a 1936 manuscript recently came to light, dating from the young Leiber's correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft, and 1997 sees the first publication of the Lovecraftian *The Dealings of Daniel Kesserich: A Study of the Mass-Insanity at Smithville* (Tor, USA).

Idries Shah (1924-1996) died on 23 November; many of his English retellings of Sufi parables – in *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin* and subsequent collections – were of interest to fantasy readers.

Gordon Van Gelder of St Martin's Press (New York) is to edit *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, following the resignation of Kristine Kathryn Rusch. He will also continue editing sf (but no longer non-sf) at St Martin's.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

World Fantasy Awards presented in 1996... Special Award (Non-Professional): Marc Michaud, for Necronomicon Press. Special Award (Professional): Richard Evans, for contributions to the genre. Artist: Gahan Wilson. Collection: Gwyneth Jones, *Seven Tales and a Fable*. Anthology: *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy* by Women ed A. Susan Williams &

Richard Glyn Jones. Short Story: Gwyneth Jones, "The Grass Princess." Novella: Michael Swanwick, *Radio Waves*. Novel: Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*. Lifetime Achievement: Gene Wolfe. Several of these provoked the traditional Langford "Whoopie!" ... and *The Prestige* US paperback rights, which had been rather hanging fire, became the subject of a small but frenzied auction.

SF Prophecy. A correspondent reports a piece of uncanny foreshadowing in a 1981 sf story: "I was no real artist. I was just your typical product of Babylon-5, all jargon and no vision." ("Mallworld Graffiti" by Somtow Sucharitkul, now better known as S. P. Somtow.)

Small Press Subsidence. *Substance* magazine is folding and returning unused subscriptions with issue 4. The 23rd issue of Chris Reed's *Back Brain Recluse* is also to be the last issue available by subscription, with *BBR* then becoming an irregular anthology. On a happier note, the poet Steve Sneyd announces his epic survey *Star-Spangled Shadows*, covering poetry in American sf fanzines from the 1930s to 1960s. SAE for details to 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD5 8PB.

BSFA Awards. The 1996 British SF Association award presentation for 1995 work was hideously delayed by various factors (including a vanishing award administrator), but at last the winners were announced. Best novel: Stephen Baxter, *The Time Ships*. Short: Brian Stableford, *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires* (*Interzone* 91 and 92). Artwork: Jim Burns, cover for *Seasons of Plenty* ... the only shortlisted item which wasn't an *IZ* cover.

Allegedly ... we await denial of the seductive rumour – transmitted by BSFA gossip columnist "Aleph" – that a Welsh edition of Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy was cancelled owing to HarperCollins Foreign Division's persistent confusion of *Mawrth Glas* (*Green Mars*) with *Mawrth Glas* (*Blue Mars*).

Honesty. Not very sf but I like it anyway: the morning after his Booker Prize for *Last Orders*, author Graham Swift was interviewed on *Today*. Q: "Who do you think are our best writers?" A: "I'm not going to name any names." Q: "Why not?" A: "Because I have an enormous hangover."

Thog's Masterclass. "Her eyes were two small heavens filled with their own wild tempests." "Cold?" Minarik asked, his voice breaking the silence as gently as if it were an egg." "Her head gimballed back to rest between her shoulders." "The tension is thicker than the gravy," he said." (all Robin Wayne Bailey, *Shadowdance*, 1996)

BOOKS



REVIEWED

The Heart of the Beast

Paul McAuley

of exotic matter, and at the same time stars older than the universe start to appear through all known shortcuts, and the Waldahud declare war on their allies. As if that's not enough, the main narrative is interpenetrated by a kind of interlude in which Keith Lansing, the administrator of *Starplex* and the hero of the book, is transported to the very far future and meets (it is quickly revealed) his own self, for he will be one of the first humans to be made immortal.

Starplex is fast-paced and packed with ideas, particularly an engaging new notion about galaxy formation and the origin of life; there are tantalizing glimpses of the evolution of life into the far future; the slow emergence of a star from the wormhole of a shortcut and a jump into intergalactic space are evocatively portrayed. But it is also riddled with clichés plucked wholesale from the magic stock-bag of sf, including telepathy, hyperspace, faster-than-light travel, artificial gravity, force fields, tractor beams and much more. None of these are used as anything other than unexplained and unexamined givens, and the story quickly degrades from hard sf meat into a kind of genre soup (in particular it echoes *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, in which a wormhole disgorges plot devices in each episode). There's also a fatal sentimentality that runs through the plot, most notably in scenes in which *Starplex* is attacked by a superior force of Waldahud ships, but no one from *Starplex* is killed, and in the subplot in which Lansing must come to terms with his dislike of the Waldahud (they killed his best friend in a misunderstanding during first contact) and with his low self esteem.

We expect hard sf to be primarily idea-driven, but Sawyer tries to shoehorn in human interest subplots too. His married hero is stricken by guilt because he lusts after a young woman in the crew, and feels he is not up to his job because he is no alpha male. Unfortunately, resolution of his internal crisis does not flow from Lansing's reactions to the external crises which provide *Starplex* with its helter-skelter momentum. He is not shown to fail, and learn from and overcome his failings. He

doesn't even bed the object of his lust, who is, after all, not much competition against his sexy, beautiful, confident and understanding wife, who is not only a brilliant biologist (one notes in passing that as in so much traditional sf, scientific endeavour is not pursued by experimental trial and error, but by sudden and always accurate insight, as of popping flashbulbs) who will discover the secret of immortality, but is also a crack laser-gunner (and darts champion). Instead, Lansing must be literally extracted from the narrative to be given sage advice by his future self, which boils down to the fact that he must be a worthwhile guy simply because he's going to live forever.

Sf is a literature of ideas. Hard sf is about ideas of trans-human scale applied to the universe as we know it. To address resolution of ordinary human problems at the same level as resolution of cosmological mysteries is to invite bathos (particularly as they are not real problems, entailing real risk, but potential problems which exist only in the characters' heads; that is they are adolescent rather than adult crises). And that's just what Sawyer delivers in this mess of a novel which tries to be all things and ends up as nothing in particular. Despite its carapace of hard facts, the heart of this book (like the heart of traditional sf) is a gooey marshmallow of sentiment and whimsy.

Stephen Baxter, on the other hand, knows just how problematic it is to try and marry the clean dreams of technology with human mess and muddle, for it is an overt theme of his alternative history of the space age, *Voyage* (Voyager, £16.99). It is not a title to inspire (a better one, if Gene Wolfe had not gotten there first, might be *Operation Ares*), but this is a big, bold, confident book which shows in precise and convincing detail how NASA might have gone to Mars in 1986 if it had not faltered after the Apollo moon-landings.

In this it is less alternative history than a thought experiment that looks back with nostalgia to a more hopeful era. Indeed, Baxter has cleverly chosen a way by which history can be altered very specifically, in that the Mars expedition is the vision of ex-President Kennedy, who survived the assassination attempt in Dallas but was so severely incapacitated by it that he could not continue in office. Such is Kennedy's power that Nixon gives him airtime in the presidential address during the first Apollo moon-landing (not very likely, given Nixon's paranoia and his hatred of Kennedy; nor is it likely that Kennedy, whose vision of an American on the Moon was driven by Cold War political contingency rather than by scientific romance, would have

We start with high expectations. Robert J. Sawyer won this year's Nebula Award for his near-future thriller *The Terminal Experiment*, and his new novel, *Starplex* (Ace, \$5.99), was first serialized in *Analog*, that sturdy redoubt of traditional hard sf. Sawyer, a Canadian, has the advantage of being able to examine sf's givens (which are of the USA, of course) from the angle of a stranger (and he scruples to give at least some of his characters an authentic Canadian rather than the usual default US origin). Despite this, *Starplex* is a book in which good ideas are badly treated, and the several moments of genuine awe are sunk in a morass of received notions and used furniture like plums in a half-baked cake.

Like much classic sf, *Starplex* has at its heart a genuinely neat premise. Here, it is that instantaneous travel between stars is possible, but only by following shortcuts bequeathed by an unknown technologically advanced race. Theoretically, shortcuts link together all the stars in the galaxy, but they cannot be used as an exit until they have been used as an entrance; to open a route, a probe must be sent to the target star in normal space, and return home through the shortcut. Thus, Sawyer presents a scenario in which, when certain rules are followed, great wonders and surprises are promised. You could make a game of it.

Starplex is an exploration vessel crewed by an alliance of humans, dolphins (by now, dolphin intelligence is a sure sign of traditional hard sf), and two types of alien, the confrontational and brusque Waldahud, and the cerebral Ib. Travelling through a newly opened shortcut, *Starplex* encounters planet-sized aliens made



been so motivated, but this is no more than a necessary excuse for the course of the narrative, and quickly elided). Thus, except for the NASA programme, history is much as we know it, allowing Baxter to concentrate fully on exactly how the manned Mars programme might have developed.

In this, he cleverly marries the tradition of many technologically speculative sf works about expeditions not (yet) taken with non-fictional accounts such as Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* and Norman Mailer's *A Fire on the Moon*. His achievement is not so much in imagining how it might have happened (for he has drawn upon NASA's detailed plans) but in showing us how the entire enterprise, as expensive and dependent on contingency as a small war, could plausibly unfold using the technology of the time, including revamped Apollo capsules and computers no smarter than pocket calculators.

Woven through the uneventful but skilfully detailed account of the mission itself, Baxter tells the complex story of how it came about. It is here that the novel gains narrative tension, from arguments about mission planning and rocket design, through political manoeuvring to win the necessary budget, to the ambitions of the astronauts themselves, most notably Joe Muldoon, here the second man to step onto the Moon after Neil Armstrong, fellow veteran Ben Priest, and Natalie York, a geologist and Priest's lover, who wins a place on the Mars mission. A lone visionary with the idea of using a gravity sling orbit in which the mission would gain momentum by a Venus flyby is pitted against the arrogance of the German rocket engineers, who press for use of an unreliable nuclear booster stage whose first orbital test ends in a disaster as terrible and poignant as that of the *Challenger* explosion. A small firm wins the contract for building the Mars lander against intense lobbying from the main companies, but at a high cost to its driven chief engineer, J. K. Lee. NASA chiefs must sacrifice unmanned probes and the shuttle programme and risk all on the manned Mars mission. And fledgling astronaut Natalie York must sacrifice her scientific career and hone her life to a single point in a milieu where women are virtually absent and gung-ho test pilots rule the roost.

Baxter handles his huge cast of characters and the interlinked strands of the story with aplomb, never losing sight of the problems of integrating human needs with the

technology required to survive in the unrelentingly hostile environment of space. A recurring motif (and it is a constant complaint of astronauts) is the problem of disposal of bodily wastes in microgravity; even before they step out onto Mars, the astronauts are concerned with whether or not they will need to take a dump in their diapers. It is perhaps inevitable, given the techno-thriller nature of the book, that few of his characters escape either cliché (hearty Russians, arrogant cold-as-ice German engineers) or two dimensions (Natalie York and the tragically manic J. K. Lee are notable exceptions), but Baxter excels in his clear and critical exposition of both the complex corporate culture of NASA and the engineering and technical procedures.



GARRY KILWORTH A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHTMARE

A master of fantasy takes on the fairies from A Midsummer-Night's Dream

More than this, *Voyage* is an insightful examination of the role of manned missions and the compromise between human triumph and scientific merit – here, probes such as Viking, Pioneer and Magellan, which in the last 20 years increased our knowledge of the Solar System a thousand-fold, never flew, and their loss is implicit at every point in the unfolding of the manned mission.

In many sf novels, the scientist is hero, struggling not against the limitations of technology, but against small-minded administrators. Here, Baxter takes a more mature view, and shows how an enterprise dependent upon technology taken to its

limits can triumph as a result of the integration of politics, engineering and naked human courage. *Voyage* is both a celebration and a nostalgic reinvention of the myth of the astronaut-as-hero, showing not only the problems of conquering a hostile environment where rationality, intelligence and technical expertise are paramount for survival, but also the human costs and triumphs within the vast enterprise. Not everyone will be turned on by the plethora of acronyms and the thickets of jargon and earnest tech-speak that comes with the territory, but if you liked *The Right Stuff* you'll probably like this too.

Garry Kilworth keeps more than one publisher busy with a prolific output of science, fantasy, mainstream and children's fiction (not to mention his poetry). Hot on the heels of the first volume of his Polynesian epic, *The Navigator Kings*, comes the young-adult contemporary fantasy *A Midsummer's Nightmare* (Bantam Press, £14.99), in which Titania and Oberon and their crew of fairies must decamp from Sherwood Forest, where the magic is failing, to the protection of the New Forest.

This must be accomplished in a Midsummer's Day, helped by an enthralled motor mechanic and hindered by the ill-disciplined fairies' propensity for mischief and their innocence of contemporary mores. Along the way, they kidnap a baby who is a direct descendant of Guinevere and Lancelot, and are pursued not only by the police but by the black fairy Morgan-le-Fey, who awakens a slew of folkloric creatures in an attempt to capture the baby, through whom she can work magic to return Britain to medieval times. The fairies' picaresque journey through the fringes of society guys the mores of contemporary Britain with gentle good-humoured satire, and ends with several neat twists that tie the various plots into an uncontrived happy ending. A low-key but enjoyable romp, in a nicely produced volume appropriately decorated with Stephen Player's splendid chapter-head vignettes.

Blueshifting (Pan, £4.99) collects six of Eric Brown's previously published short stories and two originals, one of which is the eponymous novelette. Most, like Brown's two novels and the stories in his first collection, *The Time-Lapsed Man*, are set in his *nada*-continuum future history, and are intensely-felt planetary romances, as if J. G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands* had been informed with the sensibilities of Eric Rohmer.



REVIEWED

One cannot rationalize Brown's autocratic, languid and decadent artists, with their childish rivalries and seemingly pointless competitions, but that is to miss the point. For Brown is not interested in straightforward, realistic extrapolation, but in use of sf devices (albeit old-fashioned devices: lasers and crystals which store emotions, rather than, say, nanotechnology and virtual reality) to explore new variations in the dance of intimate human relationships, often observed by an outsider drawn into their orbit. Thus, in "The Death of Cassandra Quebec" the tragic truth behind an artist's masterpiece is revealed when a disaffected maverick intrudes on his family; in "The Song of Summer" a man returns to his childhood home with bitter memories of how his first love-affair was deliberately destroyed by his father, and discovers that his

father was protecting him from tragedy; and "Epsilon Dreams" details a very strange love-triangle sustained by memory-transfer technology. These tales of catharsis and self-realization are sf infused with a cosmopolitan and literary sensibility. By no means cutting-edge, but accomplished and affecting.

Which leaves us little space for Wilhemina Baird's *Chaos Come Again* (Ace, \$12), and perhaps that's just as well. It has little in common, except the smart, side-of-mouth dialogue, with her previous cyber-punkish *noir* thrillers. Instead, it's a shapeless romp through the multiverse, set in a future where with the help of symbionts humans can assume an infinite variety of forms and live even in naked interstellar space, and sustained by nothing but its own speed as Desi Smeet, agent

for Hermes Central, pursues arch villain (and ex-husband) Ice, aided only by a journalist, a neurotic spaceship, and a disorporate planetary intelligence and its child, and the fact that as hero she can't possibly fail.

There's a great deal of fun to be had from the impish way Baird pokes holes in various sf conventions both old and new, but in this she is merely following in the footsteps of Robert Sheckley, Douglas Adams and *Red Dwarf*, and despite the plethora of colourful and concisely rendered set-pieces the book founders because since anything is possible, the plot can wander anywhere, and does, while its untelegraphed resolution is both inevitable and superfluous (and was old when used in *Star Wars*). Like a funfair ride, it is a quick thrill and a few laughs, but when it's over, it leaves no trace but a kind of dizziness.

Paul J. McAuley

There is nothing supernatural about magic. The word means power. The original, occult power of reading and writing is enshrined in present-day culture's conventional magicians and wizards: you have to be able to spell to cast a spell. But the first incantation was consciousness itself. The first magic, that brings the whole world into being, is made when we become able to inscribe what we experience in memory and communicate it in language. Two works of magic that I have to review this month have reminded me, in different ways, of how the whole disparate phenomenon of "fantasy" springs from that phase transition: when re-recognition, still in flux, spills into everything, so that the whole world is haunted, ensouled with the terrifying presence of the new born "I".

The native offering, Alan Moore's *Voice of the Fire* (Gollancz, £9.99) is the realist version. In the first of these chronicles of Northampton through the ages, Moore names and encapsulates his project beautifully. This sad and funny story of a Stone Age loser, the kind of permanent unemployable who, after his Mum dies, is left without a friend or sexual partner in the world, touches on the new existence of the Track that passes through the land, creating the known: a magical phenomenon brought into being piece by piece by the words of the powerful. *Voice of the Fire* is an English songline: passing through time instead of space, and stripped of the mystification that accrues when the irrational modern mind meets the ancient technology of the word.

Poor Hob is followed by a Bronze Age miscreant, a girl who gets away with murder (though there's an awk-

Singing it into existence

Gwyneth Jones

ward moment when the body of her victim turns up: a dead woman who hasn't been raped rouses suspicion in the acute forensic minds of the day); only to be trapped in the coils of an established religion – the separation and self-interested obfuscation of power that we saw born in the previous episode. An Iron Age hunter, survivor of an unexplained massacre, is the next to pass by; then a deeply depressed Roman tax-inspector – suffering from lead poisoning, just as we were taught in primary school. Then comes some grisly medieval saint-hood; a disillusioned crusader, an erudite and waspish Jacobean talking head (rotting on a spike); a fat-cat circuit judge ensnared by some very scary women; a defiant young witch, glorying in her craft as the flames rise; then John Clare the unhappy poet (driven mad, as it's told here, by class warfare); and lastly a flesh-creepingly prim murderer and bigamist, travelling in ladies' underwear in the 1930s. In a device reminiscent of Alan Garner's extraordinary *Red Shift*, the betrayal and murder of the Stone Age boy echoes, faintly but never fading to nothing, through the record. This is Hob's Track, and his experience is the book's message: human life is a

brutal trap, other people are mean and nasty, only bad things are true.

In the author's afterword, among the fascinating details of local history, and his infectious enjoyment of two splendid and scary daughters, there's a further proposition: that Northampton, in a world of brutal traps, is a kind of cosmic sink estate where the evil of things in general is especially concentrated; a strange attractor for dark and mucky doings. It was at this point that a certain restlessness I'd been feeling became focused. The material is rich and the tales engrossing, but the tone of these episodes is monotonous, is almost childishly uniform. I realize that it's exasperating when a critic complains because a book does exactly what it promised to do, and *Voice of the Fire* sets out to be "a collection of dark midwinter tales." But history is more than the sum of its murders. In Alan Moore's generation, in England, the power of the word became accessible as never since Hob's time (arguably, and albeit briefly) to people like me, and Moore, and poor John Clare. The recognition of that progress, just for instance, might have mixed some light into his palette. If this is supposed to be the true record of a human place through time, there's something dishonest in refusing to include joy.

JGregory Keyes's *The Waterborn* (Del Rey, \$22), though far from being a mass-market product, is the other, hugely popular, kind of fantasy – the kind that recreates the ensouled world straight-faced, as if there was once a time or there could be a place where the divinities and demons of the wakening mind were as real as rivers and mountains. Hezhi, one of many daughters of the



magically powerful royal Family of Nhol, is a pampered brat with an uncertain future, brought up by faithful servants in a corner of the vast luxurious prison of her father's palace. Perkar, son of a comfortable middle-class chieftain far away, has much better prospects, in an idyllic (well, so long as you're male and the son of a chieftain), wise and balanced rural society. But he is fated to lose everything because he has fallen in love with an Ainshu, a spirit of place; the divinity of the stream that runs through his father's pastures. The Stream Goddess is tormented, because the Great River is constantly devouring her. Perkar vows to free her. This is the beginning of big trouble for him, not only because rash vows always lead to big trouble but because the Great River Deity is not, or is no longer, a natural phenomenon. This one god, whose locus is the river but who takes human form in the Emperor of the city of Nhol, has been busy for some time eating up all the lesser spirits of the territories on his banks. The Emperor's daughter Hezhi is also his child. Unless she's very lucky or finds some extraordinary champion, he will consume her too...

The Waterborn is a coming-of-age story, a hero-tale, an adventure. The boy will blunder into terrible situations, make hideously wrong decisions: and realize, as he looks about him at the dead and dying, that this is what a hero-tale feels like from the inside. The girl will refuse to be dismissed as another brainless pretty young princess, will fight bitterly against the constraints of convention; and then, far too late, she'll discover the really horrendous truth about her world and what it intends to do with her. If you have any appetite for popular fantasy, or coming-of-age fiction in any form, you have read this story many times before. But it makes a grand difference when the writer who describes one of these awakening worlds knows where the bodies are buried. J. Gregory Keyes's songline is nothing like as dark as Alan Moore's. The comfort level for his readers is as high as you could reasonably expect. But he takes the risk of blending anthropology into his fantasy, and does it so skilfully that the cool influence of scholarship only enriches his special effects. I'm afraid it's a first-of-the-series, but seek this one out. It's magic.

Many years ago I wrote a book about a metagenetic gynoid – but the lads wouldn't have it. She was firmly relabelled a female android, and is enshrined as such in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Apparently gynoids are okay now. I'd like to think this signals an

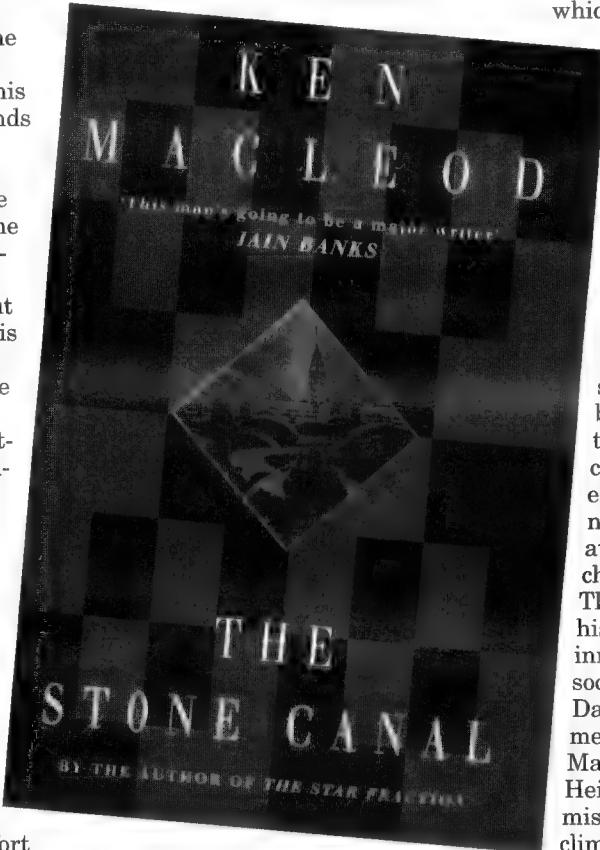
increased familiarity with the classical languages in the science-fiction community. I fear it may be that you can get away with the term if your female humanoid machine is doing something obviously feminine: like "Dee Model," the gynoid character in Ken Macleod's second sf novel *The Stone Canal* (Legend, £15.99), who starts her career as a sex-toy and never really escapes from this role, though she tries. She's by no means the only humanoid machine in *The Stone Canal*, which opens with the rebirth of a man called Jonathan Wilde, who wakes from death on an alien planet that could be Mars ... but it isn't. He finds a machine beside him, a talking machine who offers, Virgil-like, to be his guide. They set off for the nearby city, an anarchist libertarian urban paradise; where a sex-slave gynoid modelled on Jonathan's dead wife is trying to establish her autonomous identity;

where Jonathan's former

Canal to discover how things turn out in this gripping, sleekly-crafted scenario may be disappointed. The real story happened long ago and far away, in 1975 in the city of Glasgow. That's when Jonathan Wilde, lapsed leftist undergraduate, met David Reid, an entrancing rival, mirror and kindred spirit. It was love at first sight. *The Stone Canal* (as the names of the two main characters ought to have warned you) is the chronicle of their enduring passion. It follows David and Jonathan – a repellent and very well portrayed pair of greed-is-good political entrepreneurs – through an extended lifetime in which they share staggering successes, murderous rivalry; and motherly yet sexually voracious Annette, the ideal wife/girlfriend who does for both of them. The century through which they stride is an uncanny re-run of the previous, featuring a World War that starts when Germany invades Poland and in which "the Yanks" eagerly take a commanding role in Europe. (The war's even followed by a spectacularly cold winter). Things turn out much worse this time for most of the UK: but nevertheless, escape velocity is achieved, and David and Jonathan "make it to the ships," just as they promised themselves on those first student pub crawls...

There are some good unifying touches. When Jonathan, shanghaied into virtual slavery by his beloved enemy, wakes for the first time as the mind of a construction machine, he's employed on a monumental engineering project, deep in the Jovian atmosphere, that has a strong psychic kinship with the Forth Bridge. The fast-folk heaven he visits in his recreational dreams echoes the innocent religiosity of his parents' socialist beliefs. But when the David and Jonathan story finally meshes with the events on New Mars, the rest of a spectacular Heinlein-esque science fiction is dismissed in about 30 pages, and the climax is a brush-off.

The Stone Canal has the runaway narcissism of later Heinlein novels, as well as his politics and his majestic scale. By the finale almost everybody has turned out to be a version of Jonathan Wilde, a vessel for Jonathan's mind, a Jonathan Wilde support system or Jonathan's sexy virtual helpmate. Even David is only seen from Jonathan's point of view. Yet the portrait of their deathless love, the more intense because it survives without any eroticism, or even affection in the normal sense, is both convincing and oddly moving. Seas may run dry, rocks crack in the sun, the Singularity at the end of the universe will get us all. But Jonathan



self is revered as the father of space-faring civilization; and where Dave Reid, Jonathan's beloved enemy, is running the whole show. A story shapes up, in very fine style, involving the gynoid; and the city's dissidents (well, of course there are dissidents in paradise: you want everyone to be happy, don't you?); and the fate of the countless dead people still in computer storage, who cannot be resurrected in new bodies on this new world because that would wake the AI post-human "fast folk" too, and they might trigger a truly awesome catastrophe in space/time...

But anyone reading *The Stone*



BOOKS

and David will still be walking the great Road Bridge across the Forth some long hour after midnight, dead-dog drunk and deliriously happy, spinning the yarn of their voyage to the stars.

I only came across the concept of "hardboiled fantasy" quite recently, but obviously it's already a movement. The rules of this game are that the story has to be a PI or cop-procedural, most of the action has to take place in the darkened streets of a decayed metal-monster city, as it were in the belly of the dying beast of machine-culture civilization: and it has to be set in the USA. Jonathan Lethem and Michael Marshall Smith are notable practitioners: Lethem in the literary tradition of Raymond Chandler and other hardboiled crime writers; Marshall Smith favouring the films and TV. Everyone in the movement is indebted to William Gibson's Sprawl novels, but this isn't exactly sf. The ensouled world is back with us again, and in no very friendly mood. The dying city, imbued with cyborg life, is a dangerous god.

Sean Williams's *Metal Fatigue* (HarperCollins Australia, \$12.95) is a version of this *film noir* fantasy from a new and promising Aus-

tralian writer. His story sticks to the conventions but gives them an individual flavour; and a strange gentleness. There is a humane older cop with a secret past, something between father and lover to his young female partner; there is a mystery monster, an amoral but very reasonable disembodied master-crook; a terror of the machine that equates Sprawl-style augmented humans with devil worship; and there's the essential backdrop of corrupt politics. *Metal Fatigue* needs something to pull it together, some faster and simpler vector for the crucial elements of the plot. It gets prosy at times. But it's a good solid read.

Margaret Wander Bonanno's *Preternatural* (Tor, \$23.95) is a Trekkie *roman à clef* masquerading as a story about a kind of psychological alien invasion. I don't think *roman à clef* is putting it too strongly, when "the writer of several best-selling *Star Trek* novels" comes up with a fiction about a TV sci-fi show called "Spaceseekers," starring the supposedly hunky Captain Stark and Benn, his actually much cooler and more appealing alien sidekick. There's also a leggy ex-dancer Hollywood movie star with a successful second career in rebirthing seminars,

and other characters I'd probably recognize if I were more up on these things. *Preternatural* is an odd confection, full of authorial asides and quips about the writer failing to control her inventions.

I'm not sure how seriously – if at all – I'm supposed to take the central conceit that an alien race of intelligent jellyfish has started to plant messages in the mind of a struggling science-fiction writer – having failed to bring about World Peace and Global Enlightenment by trying the same trick on Akhenaten; a female carpenter operating in Nazareth around the same time as Jesus; Jesus; Hypatia the scientist of Alexandria; and a few other historical figures. However (naturally enough) Bonanno is hot on *Trek* fandom, conventions, panels, the dreaded Vast Mad Questioner; signing sessions, and juicy insider information on the original *Star Trek* (oops, sorry I mean *Spaceseekers*) cast. This makes gossipy entertainment. I hope the faithful readers of Bonanno's *Star Trek* novels don't identify themselves too closely with the annoying "geeks and weirdos" who plague *Preternatural*'s con-guesting sf writer. But I suppose she knows what she's doing.

Gwyneth Jones

The ever-problematic relationship between science and religion continues to generate fuss and bother; the features pages, review sections and letter columns of broadsheet newspapers continue to devote a good deal of space to disputes between theologians, cosmologists and evolutionists as to the implications of the still-unfolding revelation of modern science. Science fiction has used its own methods to explore a whole range of stances, incarnate in several of the acknowledged classics of the genre: James Blish's *A Case of Conscience*; Anthony Boucher's "The Quest for St Aquin"; Arthur Clarke's "The Star" and Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Speculative fiction by writers outside the genre like C. S. Lewis and Franz Werfel has added a significant further contribution to this problematic area of concern. Now that Walter Miller has died it will fall to Terry Bisson to overcome Miller's interminable writer's block and bring the sequel to *A Canticle for Leibowitz* to its conclusion; in the meantime, the debut novel by anthropologist Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow* (Villard, \$23), will obtain wide circulation by virtue of being taken up by the Book-of-the-Month Club. We have come a long way since Horace Gold rejected the short version of *A Case of Conscience* because he ran "a family magazine" which, by virtue of that definition, had no place for "all that

Another Case of Conscience

Brian Stableford

religious jazz."

To sf readers *The Sparrow* will inevitably seem like a second take on *A Case of Conscience*. Its central character is a Jesuit who becomes part of the team appointed to make first contact with an alien species but finds that the manifest reality of alien society puts a severe strain on his faith. When Blish, in the guise of William Atheling Jr, reviewed his own story he complained that the ending was not sufficiently ambiguous – a criticism which leads me to conclude that he would have loved *The Sparrow* and envied its author the availability of a marketplace willing to tolerate such devastating ambiguity. What Mary Doria Russell might think of *A Case of Conscience*, if she even knows of its existence, I can only guess, but I suspect that she would find it insufficiently Jesuitical – a judgment which would, in a suit-

ably wry fashion, praise it with faint damnation.

The Sparrow looks back, as an anthropologist's novel would, to all the "first contacts" which have taken place in the last 510 years (the last of them in the early years of this century). It is built on the knowledge that the arrival of ambassadors of Western civilization, however well-intentioned, have always been disastrous for the cultures thus contacted – all of which have been obliterated or altered out of all recognition in the aftermath of contact. It is built, too, on the recognition that Jesuits were almost always among the first wave of contactors, and that their ambassadors very often took the brunt of any violent backlash generated by the contacts. Russell's hypothetical ambassadors, being without exception good and knowledgeable people, want to do better than their predecessors. They go where no man has gone before boldly determined to commit no sins; they are meek, and they are as pure in heart as it is possible for humans to be – the author goes to great pains to establish this fact in her slow but effective build-up – but their mission nevertheless goes horribly wrong, in a fashion that rings horribly true.

The Sparrow (whose title comes from the observation that although no sparrow ever falls without God's knowledge and pity the sparrow falls



nevertheless) is a carefully-crafted mystery story which hoards until the last few of its 380 pages the revelation of exactly what happened to Emilio Sandoz, S.J., on the alien world. At times the reader may feel a trifle impatient with his reluctance to spell out the causes of his utter abjection, but it is done in a good cause, because the real point at issue is not what was done but what ought to be inferred from what was done within the context of Emilio's religious faith and the organization to which he belongs. The Gordian intricacy of that problem requires extraordinarily elaborate establishment, in terms of the characterization of both the Jesuit and non-Jesuit characters, and once properly established there is no way that the knot can be brutally severed by the kind of device that Blish felt obliged to deploy in his tale. Here, conscience has to go the full distance, with no ready-made refuge in sight.

I must admit to a certain surprise

that the Book-of-the-Month Club picked up this novel, although the decision has my wholehearted endorsement. The novel's prose is exceptionally well-crafted, the characterization exceptionally detailed, the story exceptionally gripping and the climax exceptionally moving, but it is nevertheless a conscientious science-fiction novel which does not skimp on its careful explanation of how an interstellar expedition might be mounted. Nor is it in any way a *comforting* book – and its selectors must have been aware that America has a good number of strident interest groups whose members will find much in it to deplore. Even those who approve of its moral conclusions – and it is not obvious that the Vatican would pronounce them orthodox, although they are certainly respectful of Catholic faith and Catholic ambition – will inevitably find much to unsettle them along the route by which those conclusions are attained. *The Sparrow* is, in essence, a chal-

lenging book – which is, in my view, the best kind, although it is a kind which has not traditionally been favoured by populist book clubs.

I doubt that Mary Doria Russell will be able to compete with Lois McMaster Bujold for next year's Hugo award, and I dare say that many of the field's critics will hail this fact as further evidence of the popular genre's moral and aesthetic bankruptcy, but those sorts of games are played according to their own rules. As TV assumes command of the genre label, squeezing out from beneath its protective umbrella the last fugitive vestiges of intellectual seriousness, there will be some readers who will find great relief in the news that books like *The Sparrow* can now be packaged and successfully sold as literary novels. It is a book which everyone with a serious interest in science-fictional thought-experiments ought to read.

Brian Stableford

For me the Grail Quest has always been the least attractive aspect of Arthurian legend; however stirring the events which it had witnessed, it was but a made thing – hardly worth breaking up the Fellowship of the Round Table to find it, especially as it could never be brought home. As Guinevere says in Keith Taylor's "The Castles of Testing," "What about the oppressed, the weak, those threatened by bandits, monsters and evil neighbours? ... They will find the Round Table empty, their hope gone." And isn't the pious exaltation of/exhortation to male virginity (as spectacularly not exemplified by the genial Arthur, Lancelot and Merlin) associated with it a bit ... unhealthy?

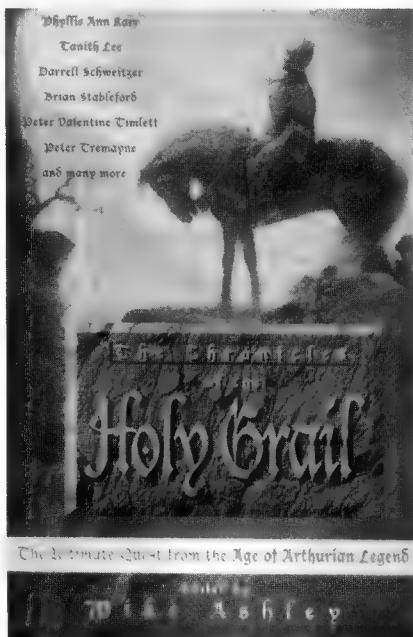
That aside, it's an enduring myth, and I opened *The Chronicles of the Holy Grail* (Raven, £5.99) with high expectations. The collection is edited with a scholarly introduction by Mike Ashley, though the scholarship is belied by the carefully crafted linked opening stories of Peter Tremayne and P. V. Trimlett. That both are somewhat mannered is excusable; that they are based on a bogus historical premise is not. Things get better quickly, with a phantasmagoric extract from *The Mabinogion* and Cherith Baldry's "The Hunt of the Hart Royal," which presents the relationship between Gareth Beaumains and Sir Kay in an original light, and Keith Taylor's story, which doesn't attempt Mallory's style but is very much in his spirit.

The general arrangement is quasi-chronological, with stories relating to earlier times preceding those which trace the Grail's manifestations through Arthur's reign and beyond, but for me they fall into two groups:

Grail Quests and Assorted Horrors

Chris Gilmore

those which disregard the spirit of the Dark Ages, and those which seek to capture it. That makes for some interesting tension, as the divide has nothing to do with literary quality. Tanith Lee and Darrell Schweitzer both use the Grail as a mere hook whereon to hang stories very much of



our own time, but as both show the ingenuity and concern for the language typical of their authors, I'm not complaining.

Others have sought to capture that spirit, and none does it better than Phyllis Ann Karr in "Galahad's Lady." This distils the very essence of the Age of Faith, with its presumption of an ineluctably omnipresent and insatiably burdensome God whom one *must* love. "Be ye therefore perfect," said Jesus; "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," said St Paul: slice your integration where you like, it must have been as bad as a social conscience to anyone who took it seriously, and there's abundant evidence that many did. As late as the 11th century Edward the Confessor, by way of demonstrating his piety, refused to consummate his marriage; for which he was applauded while living and canonized once dead. One considers the allegedly uptight High Victorians, who cut Ruskin in the street for the same reason; as for our own age, we'd have sentenced him to non-stop counselling until he sacrificed his virginity to be rid of the social worker.

Central to the whole neurotic cauldron of guilt, lust, obsession and the sort of tremulous distaste for their own sexuality which we of more enlightened times reserve for other peoples', lies the character of Sir Galahad, Lancelot's bastard conceived by subterfuge. Tougher than Arnie, prissier than Noddy, instantly disliked by all, his failure to return from the Grail Quest occasions open relief but indicates that virtue has fled the Round Table. A man of his capacities is essentially uninteresting as a character – who could be



more boring than a superhero? – but Peter T. Garratt, in "The Secret History," tries to repair the damage by presenting him in Celtic guise, and *en passant* composing a very fine pastiche of a skaldic boast-song. He also brings him into tension with Vivien, an idea that earlier writers have neglected, and which works rather better than Lawrence Schimel and Mark Garland's equally interesting but less effective insinuation of the Shroud of Turin into the company of the Great Hallows.

Altogether, this is an inevitably uneven but unfailingly interesting collection. From the later stories my own favourites include Parke Godwin's "The Last Rainbow," a clever variant on the traditional fairy tale, and Brian Stableford's "The Lost Romance," which brings the Grail into quasi-contact with a quasi-Robin Hood – but it's cheap at the price: buy it and choose your own.

An archetypal aspect of the American Dream is the smug, ultra-folksy Midwestern rural community where everyone knows everyone else, and from which anyone with an ounce of fun, libido or intellect would bankrupt himself to escape. Sometimes called "The Real America," it has given rise to the epigram that "God made the country, Man made the city, and the Devil made the small town." Ray Bradbury celebrates it, Clifford Simak loved it, Spengler held that it sustained the cultural soul of a nation and you may draw your own conclusions. Peter Crowther and James Lovegrove have christened their version *Escardy Gap* (Tor, \$26.95) and recount how Jeremiah Rackstraw, a senior minion of the Devil, rides in a-visiting his handiwork.

He rides in style, with what he describes as one each of the Furies, the Fates and the Hesperides (Why her? Why not a Siren?) fetchingly disguised as Graces to adorn the engine of his personal train. But be not fetched; all three feed voracious appetites via the *vagina dentata*. Other members of his entourage having, by a combination of personal charm and moral blackmail, insinuated themselves into the lives of the populace, set about the predictable mayhem, each in his/her own special way. It's handled as more than usually imaginative black farce with some fine bravura passages: the one which takes four pages to tell how a pipe is filled and lit deserves to be adopted as a model of suspense-writing.

Most importantly for me the authors address a nagging wrongness, which I find in almost all genre horror but very little fantasy, however dark: that the evil incursion is unsought and unearned. Horrid as

the folk are, with their cracker-barrel wisdom, Mom's pie, regular church-going and long evenings gossiping in the porch, they deserve nothing worse than to be left to get on with it – preferably behind a minefield and a forest of razor-wire, but that's just my prejudice. Another of my prejudices – and one which I share with the Escardy Gap's Mayor – holds that, while the real world is full of injustice, in fiction the supernatural should effect a certain symmetry between what is sown and what is reaped. The Mayor expresses that forcefully enough to Rackstraw, only to be told that for all the torture and murder there is neither rationale nor justice, only the exercise of malign whimsy.

It's a grim and gruesome message, the more so as, though the book uses multiple viewpoints, the most important is that of Josh, aged 12 going-on 13. If you know such a boy with a very strong stomach who appreciates good writing, this may be the ideal present, but I'd run it past his mother first if you want to eat lunch there again.

I suppose I should add that the story's written inside a frame that explores an entirely different set of American clichés, somewhat in the manner of the diary entries that Samuel Delany used to punctuate *The Einstein Intersection*, but with the crucial difference that they are obviously fictitious. They add little until the book is almost over, where they're used in a way that I should not disclose, but they echo a third story that one of the characters is writing, suggesting the authors had half an eye on future PhD students. The effect is a little mannered, but only a little and offers a welcome variety of tone. Somewhat to my surprise I found I liked this one – it's so exceptionally well done; and for those who do like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing they will like a whole lot.

In an ideal world the writer's race, gender, sexual preferences and political affiliations would be irrelevant to the reader and therefore ignored by the reviewer, who might note and comment on whatever implicit assumptions or explicit messages about them were contained in the text, but disdain reflections *ad hominem*. But in the case of Steve Barnes's *Blood Brothers* (Tor, \$24.95) I think it needs mentioning that Barnes is a heterosexual, right-wing, black American intellectual, because such a combination must surely attract flak from many sources. To a great extent the book is about what it is like to be Steve Barnes, who has chosen for its emblem the beating of Rodney King, the acquittal of the police who beat him, and the riots which followed.

Rednecks will hate Barnes for an "uppity dam' nigra"; "Nation-Building" black Islamic Marxists will hate him for a traitor; and liberals of all complexions will disapprove, as they disapprove whatever neither mirrors their ideals nor reinforces their prejudices. Barnes's unusual position in the all-too-small black American middle class invests his book with a social and political significance beyond its artistic merits, though those are not to be discounted.

Barnes's psychological portraiture is deft (as it needs to be, many of his characters being extreme by any standards) and he has a fine sense of place, especially when the places are unpleasant. He also combines cutting-edge computer science and the explicitly supernatural without incongruity, and the story bangs along at a great pace. Derek Weekes, a black computer scientist, finds his family under attack from both a supernatural entity which seems bent on killing his daughter by spontaneous human combustion, and corrupt human police with similar ends but more conventional means. The only person who can help is Austin Tucker, a gung-ho White Supremacist currently serving life for mass-murder (unjustly, as it happens, but Weekes doesn't know) who must first be sprung.

That done, this unlikely pair come first to respect, then to like each other, as they seek to unravel an intricate and extremely nasty supernatural web reaching back over at least two centuries. The effect is rather like a wedding of Roger MacBride Allen's *Orphan of Creation* to Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* solemnized by James Herbert, and with so much going on it's not surprising that the book shows little sense of direction until it's two-thirds over. The ending, highly cathartic though it is, seems somewhat rushed in consequence.

Also on the debit side, Barnes should have known better than to present so much of the story as the autobiography of a lady who had died in 1867; it's a gripping read, but the prose rhythms and vocabulary are wrong, sometimes hilariously so, as when a man is described as looking like a gorilla in the 1790s. There are other signs of haste: an empty gun is fired again before there's been any opportunity to reload, and the name of a house suddenly changes from "Looker Mansion" to "Casa DuPris". Small defects in what is at even the most superficial level a fine supernatural thriller, but someone should have spotted them before I did.

The experience of waking up feeling like death and beside a total stranger is, I suspect, more spoken of than undergone: someone you wouldn't normally fancy / don't much

like / only met yesterday evening while already well away – OK, occasionally, when very young; but a complete stranger? And attractive? Rare.

Such, nonetheless, is the experience of Jonty Marks, protagonist of Chaz Brenchley's *Dispossession* (Hodder & Stoughton, £15.99). Moreover, his physical discomfort is the effect of a bad car-smash three days earlier, and he's lost three months of memory – including his entire courtship of and marriage to the enchanting Suzie. He's naturally upset, but not for the loss of what should be precious memories; in his own mind he's still in love with Carol, his previous girlfriend of seven years. Less cataclysmic but still important to a staid young solicitor, he's in a private room for which Vernon Deverill, a local wideboy, is picking up the tab.

It's a strong situation, but Brenchley undermines it with a perverse choice of persona. Jonty shows as narrow-minded, ignorant, unadventurous and above all dull; the despair of his bohemian mother, and proud of it. How he ever got work in a firm of any standing is one of those mysteries, but finding himself with a far more attractive woman in much more glamorous surroundings and (if the room is anything to go by) engaged in more interesting work, he pines for the *status quo ante* – as such a man surely would, but how to whip up sympathy for a dweeb?

And things get worse. Brenchley introduces what is best described as a premature *deus ex machina*; seems Jonty has a friend, sort-of, called Luke. Luke is a hermit of vague supernatural powers who lurks on a hilltop in Cumbria, cultivating a laconically pretentious style of utterance and the adulation of New Agers and weekend hippies – like Jonty. Is he the Green Man? or the Fool on the Hill? Is Luke short for Lucifer? Is he one Lucifer short of a matchbox? Whichever, Jonty goes to see him, learns nothing, picks up a snatch of odd information from a local cop, goes back.

And so the book lurches along. The difficulties of a man who must make a relationship with a woman whom he likes and admires, and who regards him as her husband, but whom he does not love and cannot remember ever having loved are of interest and well handled – except that they keep on being interrupted by the unresolved problem of exactly what is his relationship with Deverill, and why someone seems to be trying to kill him. A more skilful writer might have reconciled the two strands, but Brenchley plays it complex, which means *interaction*, and that's fatal for someone who seems only able to create one character at a time.

Except for Jonty his male characters are cyphers, but the women are worse: there's never any indication

why Suzie should ever have looked twice at Jonty (the same problem that undermines Richard Adams's *The Girl in a Swing* but in exaggerated form); he fails to give Carol a walk-on until the book is two thirds over, when she fails to offer any balance to Suzie; and Jonty's feisty mother plumbs new depths of incredibility. The story gets sillier and sillier, as Brenchley explains the various mysteries he has created in terms of ever more unlikely motivation until back comes the *Angelus ex Machina* (Brenchley's own term) to dispose of the principal villain.

Curiously, given the above, Brenchley writes well almost all the time, like a *belles lettres* essaying a first novel (though this is listed as his eighth) and his intentional manglings of familiar quotations in the text (especially when Jonty's mother appears for the first time) are clever and original; but the whole reads like the marriage of at least three dissimilar wrecks from a literary pile-up in dense verbal fog.

A final grouch. Brenchley has gone to the effort of naming all 14 of his chapters, some quite wittily, but Hodder & Stoughton have begrimed him a contents page; on the other hand, they have supplied an expensive dust jacket that implicitly promises gay porn within. I was content to find none, but anyone buying it for that reason is morally entitled to a refund.

Chris Gilmore

Fantasy fiction can be formulized because it has in its secure custody a number of elementary story-structures which can stand any amount of repetition. Repetition is an advantage rather than a handicap when it attains the functions of ritual, each movement reaffirming some fundamental aspect of our social consciousness – which stands, of course, in constant need of reaffirmation by virtue of being something shared. One such elementary story-structure is the tale of an individual who moves from a milieu whose rules are understood and internalized to one which is unfamiliar and problematic. In many versions the movement is from civilization to barbarism but even if it is the other way around it is still a brave venture into moral wilderness where the old norms do not apply – a journey in which the wisdom of adulthood is devalued and the painful uncertainties of childhood return in full force, all the more agonizing for their seeming impropriety.

This pattern is extraordinarily elastic, capable of many different manifestations. In Terri Windling's novel *The Wood Wife* (Tor, \$22.95) the mover is a citified writer who inherits a house on the edge of the Arizona desert, and finds the sur-

Babes in the Wilderness

Brian Stableford

rounding land inhabited by archetypal magical forces given particular form by the previous owners' artistic genius. In Jeff VanderMeer's novella *Dradin in Love* (Buzzcity Press, P.O. Box 38190, Tallahassee, FL 32315, USA; \$9.95) the mover is an out-of-work missionary who returns to the decadent city of Ambergris as Festival time approaches and enlists a direly unreliable go-between to assist in his courtship of a lovely woman glimpsed through a high window. In the Forkbeard Fantasy company's *The Fall of the House of Usherettes* (The Lyric Studio and 18 other venues throughout the UK Oct.-Dec. 1996) the mover is film buff Bernard von Earlobe, who comes to the decaying Empire Picture Palace in search of the secret of liquid film and finds himself entrapped in the phantasmagoric world of Roderick

Lilyhair and his three sinister sisters.

In terms of their style and method it would be hard to imagine three works of art more different than these, and their similarity of structure certainly does not suffice to make them peas in a pod. Even so, they all share a common and vital purpose: to dramatize and celebrate the anxiety and exhilaration of entering the unknown – and they are all, according to their different lights, quite excellent.

Terri Windling's novel *The Wood Wife* is, as might be expected, the weightiest and most earnest of the three. Having long established herself within the field as an artist and an editor of considerable influence – for whose vision, ambition and ingenuity genre fantasy already has much to be thankful – she must have felt that her first novel carried a fearful burden of expectation. Any slight failure of elegance or intelligence would have seemed glaring. Fortunately, there is none; the characters are well-wrought, to the extent that one can believe in them as artists as well as human beings, and the tale is carefully built to its vivid and compelling climax. Here, as befits a fan-



REVIEWED

tasy with authentic gravitas the mover adapts herself to her wilderness, not by taming it but by learning enough of its hidden workings to negate its worst threats and draw profit from its most generous opportunities.

Jeff VanderMeer's novella *Dradin in Love* – the work of a prolific poet and short-story writer whose work has mostly appeared in respectable but unprofitable small-press publications – rejoices in the freedom of relative esotericism. Its sly jokes and off-hand references are unrepentantly varied and blithely recherché; the book carries a dedication to "the late Angela Stalker," preferring that author's maiden name to the signature she used on her books. In such a work as this there is no need, and perhaps no possibility, of the kind of adaptation that Windling's heroine was honour-bound to win. Poor Dradin, victim of a *fin de siècle* sensibility, is bound to find the wilderness of excessive artifice cold, inhospitable and wounding – as all truly sensitive souls must. The author's prose is delicate and ornate, but the narrative has force and wit in plenty. The book is, incidentally, a remarkably well-produced volume with handsome

illustrations by Michael Shores and it is an auspicious debut for its publisher, who also edits the excellent small-press magazine *The Silver Web*.

Forkbeard Fantasy's dramatic collage *The Fall of the House of Ushereettes*, which has five parts but only three actors (Ed Jobling, Chris Britton and Tim Britton), is an out-and-out comedy stuffed with nudging references to the more Poe-esque aspects of cinematic history. The stage set is a masterpiece of ingenuity and its possibilities are exploited to the full as live performance and filmed inserts are neatly woven together into a fast-moving and intricate plot whose climax is a fine *coup de théâtre*. In comedy, of course, the true horror of the wilderness may become unapologetically apparent and the predicament of the central character can be reduced to the simple alternatives of escape and annihilation. Neither adaptation nor a tragic failure to adapt can be applicable in an extravaganza of this kind. (For those unfortunate enough to miss the play while it toured the length and breadth of the land there is a tabloid comic book based on Tim

Britton's storyboard; further information is available from Forkbeard, Huntsham, Tiverton, Devon EX16 7NF).

None of us is immune from the responsibility of moving from the social situations we know into ones which are new – and, by virtue of being new, puzzling, threatening and challenging. Anyone who were immune from such movements would hardly be enviable on that account, because they would be existentially stagnant. We have every reason, therefore, to be grateful for such analyses of the predicament as these, not because they tell us how to do it – we must, of necessity, already know *that* – but because they tell us exactly what the achievement is worth, in terms of the only currencies that really matters. We need the earnest versions almost as much as we need the ironic ones, which we need almost as much as we need the comic ones – which, in their paradoxical turn, we need almost as much as the earnest ones. As Johan Huizinga has observed, play is the most serious activity in which we can indulge ourselves.

Brian Stableford

The now annual *Dark Terrors* anthology (aka *Dark Voices*, aka, arguably, the late lamented *Fantasy Tales*) from Stephen Jones and David Sutton once again rears its misshapen head with its second volume in this current incarnation. And it's a goody.

In fact, *Dark Terrors 2* (Gollancz, £16.99) is a blisteringly good collection ... so good that any editor not having an anthology out during 1996 should consider him- or herself very lucky indeed when it comes to Awards time next year. There'll be tears ... and they shouldn't be from Messrs Jones and Sutton! Of course, not every story rings the bell and there's bound to be one clunker between these pages to satisfy the inherent need to grumble that we all possess. But finding that clunker is a hell of a task.

On top of their form, the ever dependable Ramsey Campbell ("Out of the Woods") and Nicholas Royle ("The Comfort of Stranglers") provide tales of surreal intensity that eat away at the reader long after the book has been put down. Less subtle – but wildly amusing – Brian Lumley's "A Really Game Boy" is a grossly satisfying worm-in-cheek epic of Southern folk with a monumental sense of juvenile dares and endurance; Conrad Williams's "Something For Free" carries an unacceptably high price tag; and, in "(Melodrama)," David Schow delivers a frenetic, irreverent and blustering

Short Stuff

Peter Crowther

homage to the late great Robert Bloch.

Fine work also comes from Clive Barker, with "Animal Farm," a brief but entirely succinct treatise on friendship, devotion and loss, and from Graham Masterton, whose "Underbed" is a bizarre world awaiting a young boy with an over-developed sense of imagination. Somewhat closer to home, meanwhile, Dennis Etchison's "The Dead Copy" details the inexorable drift of inner city civilization into the mythical mean streets of mindless violence, while Harlan Ellison lets rip with a fantastic fable worthy of Howard Waldrop and a pun that would make Spider Robinson squirm.

There are many more – a marvelously inventive instalment in Kim Newman's "Where the Bodies Are Buried" cycle (this one sub-titled "2020") and Peter Straub's "Hunger: An Introduction," an everyday tale of ghosts and murderers, remorse and old radio shows ... to name but two – but the real icing on the cake comes

from a clutch of stories which are uniformly superb.

Michael Marshall Smith surpasses even his own high standards with "Hell Hath Enlarged Herself," a bleak view of Armageddon in which, thanks to the efforts of a couple of scientists, the dead resume their places in society; Steve Rasnic Tem's "The Rains," a painfully beautiful story of loss, grief and fanaticism ... and the dual restorative and punishing qualities of water; Paul McAuley's "Negative Equity," a gothic melodrama with almost Lovecraftian undertones as an upwardly mobile couple discover the hidden costs required to keep the house of their dreams; and Jay Russell's poignant "Lily's Whisper," which any description would fail to do justice and which secures my vote as best story of the year.

We all know of the inevitable commercial pressures on any anthology project – the "need" for a publisher to have a so-called "A-list" author ... and we could all think of one or two collections on which one occasionally might have even been forgiven for thinking more care had been given to assembling the correct names than to sorting the literary wheat from the mountainous piles of chaff that every editor must face over his or her cereals. The thing to remember is that, Thanksgiving and Christmas notwithstanding, the so-called "bankable" names are just as capable of carving the occasional turkey as are



fledgling writers. Sometimes even more so.

Happily, Jones and Sutton have always recognized the burgeoning talent in the field – Royle, Lane, Williams, Smith *et al* – even before the inclusion of such writers became fashionable. And, where last year's volume was merely good, this year's offering reaches a level of excellence that few anthologies and anthology editors ever achieve: as such, it should serve as a template for the quality that can be reached ... a template which should be observed by editor and writer alike.

Also recently added to the anthology row is *Otherwhere* (Ace, \$5.99), a nicely entertaining collection of alternative takes on lycanthropic transformations edited by Laura Anne Gilman and Keith R. A. DeCandido.

This is a really enjoyable read, with the emphasis more on fun (without being frivolous) than on providing frequent frissons of unease, with more than its fair share of outstanding stories amongst tales involving were-salmon and were-tropical fish, were-hamsters, were-elephants, were-mice, were-snakes, were-horses, a were-computer-programme and even a were-bigot! Some of the tales are poignant – inevitable, given the theme – some are amusing and one or two are thoughtful and considered ... most notably Adam-Troy Castro's "The Way Things Ought To Be," in which a perfectly normal man is turned into a violent racist. Elsewhere, there's fine work from all parties, particularly from Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Craig Shaw Gardner, Esther Friesner, Greg Cox, Jody Lynn Nye, R. A. Salvatore and Shariann Lewitt. The best – at least for me – are Castro's piece and Josepha Sherman's absolutely delightful "I've Got the Horse Right Here," a wondrous blend of *Mr Ed* and Thorne Smith (*Turnabout*) with some almost Runyonesque undertones in the racetrack scenes. Great stuff!

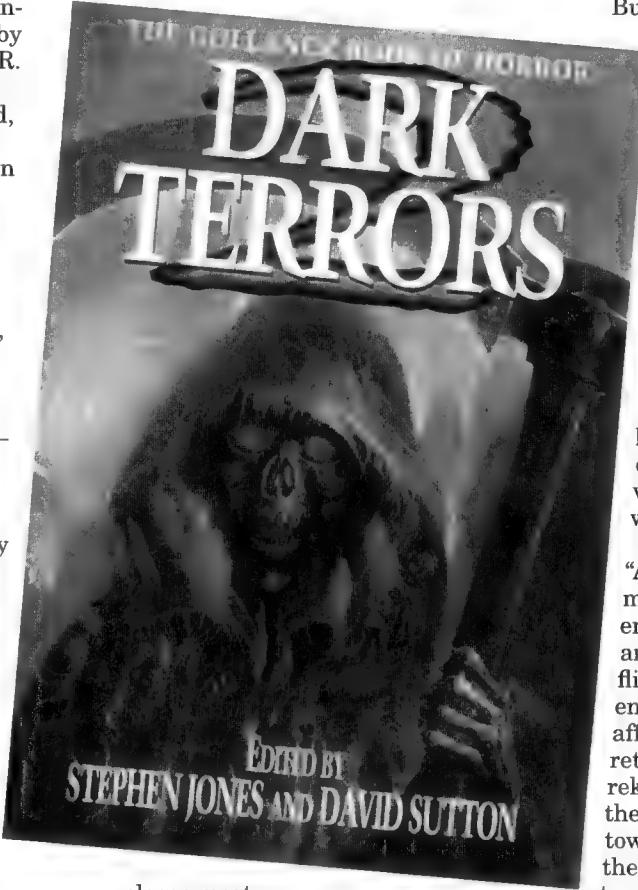
As far as some people are concerned, a new book by Ray Bradbury is something of an event. That said, to some others the same news would undoubtedly be greeted by muted derision.

Bradbury is one of those writers whose work elicits extreme reactions: you either love him or hate him, it seems. I'll make my position clear from the start: I approach a new Bradbury book with a feverish excitement I've had since my first exposure to his work more than three decades ago. That's exactly what I did with

Quicker Than the Eye, his first book for Avon (\$22) and his first "official" collection since 1988's *The Toynebee Convector* (not counting the 1992 "novel" *Green Shadows, White Whale* which was, in fact, a patch up of old "Irish" stories).

It's appropriate that a new collection from Bradbury should come out in time to be included in this column because the man is a past master at the short form ... perhaps he's the best there is. Certainly he's up there with the contenders.

Undimmed by advancing years – he's now 76 – Bradbury nevertheless shows himself to be both as good and as weak as he's ever been, with maybe just a tad too much of the latter and not quite enough of the former to



please most tastes. That said, however, *Quicker Than the Eye* delivers.

Bradbury has always worn his heart on his sleeve. For what to many writers would simply be a sunny day, becomes in Bradbury speak a fully-rounded, multi-layered and multi-sensory explosion of thoughts and feelings: rolling fields, new sneakers, school holidays, friends, parents and siblings ... with just a hint of something unusual and inexplicable taking place at the periphery of vision.

On the evidence of this new set, much of the inexplicable has been sidelined in order to give full rein to his nostalgia and the bite of some of his early work – most notably the old *Dark Carnival/October Country* tales – is rarely in evidence... although "Free Dirt," in which a keen gardener

avails himself of a sign in the local boneyard only to discover he's brought home more than everyday soil, comes close enough to leave a pleasant tingle or two.

Sometimes, of course, the rose-tinted spectacles erode the facts completely (something we're all guilty of from time to time): his "Last Rites," in which the protagonist travels back in time to show three dying writers (Melville, Poe and Wilde) that their work would be remembered long after they had gone, conveniently sets aside the fact that, when approached by John Huston to write the screenplay for *Moby Dick* Bradbury found the book, which he hadn't read at that point, to be impenetrable.

But there are some lovely stories here – most of them not classic (at least not by Bradbury's standards), but almost all of them memorable – and the best ones could happily stand alongside his finest work.

Worthy of special mention are "Remember Sascha," in which aspiring writer Douglas Spalding and his wife, Maggie, produce their first child, and "The Woman On the Lawn," in which a man meets the time-travelling projected id of his mother when she's about to meet his father. These neatly book-ended tales show Bradbury doing what he does best ... thinking wishfully.

Elsewhere, the wonderful "Another Fine Mess" features two middle-aged women who encounter the ghosts of Laurel and Hardy shifting a piano up a flight of stone steps in search of an energizing dose of recognition and affection; "Exchange" has a man return to his old home town to rekindle his past only to find it's not there any more ... except in the town library, safe in the pages of the books he read as a child; a travel-weary family straight of a Norman Rockwell calendar turn off the Freeway onto "The Other Highway" ... and into a past of sorts; and, in "The Very Gentle Murders," an old couple try desperately to kill each other ... with disastrous results for casual visitors to the house.

In what is perhaps his most intensely personal collection since *Dandelion Wine*, the grand old man of letters gives us a score-and-one vignettes – nine of which are previously unpublished – of people populating a universe that maybe we'd all like to populate. Further evidence, surely, that they who profess to be tired of Bradbury are grown bored with emotion, unimpressed by the simple beauty of language and done with life itself. A marvellous book, warts and all.

Peter Crowther

BOOKS RECEIVED



NOVEMBER
1996

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian. *The Secret of This Book: 20-Odd Stories*.

Illustrated by the author. Harper-Collins, ISBN 0-00-649793-4, 334pp, B-format paperback, cover by Gary Embury, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in 1995; it contains stories plus interconnecting matter of a meditative, autobiographical sort; the tales include two, "Becoming the Full Butterfly" and the very controversial "Horse Meat," from *Interzone*; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 103.) 18th November 1996.

Asimov, Isaac. *Gold: The Final Science Fiction Collection*.

Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648202-3, 434pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1995; over half the contents consist of non-fiction essays about sf and sf writing; reviewed by Nigel Brown in *Interzone* 109.) Late entry: September (?) publication, received in November 1996.

Aycliffe, Jonathan. *The Lost*.

HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-649615-6, 243pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first edition; set in vampire-haunted Transylvania, this is the fifth creepy short novel by "Aycliffe" to be published for the Christmas season: they've become an institution; he used to be better known as thriller-writer "Daniel Easterman," but his real name is Denis MacEoin.) 18th November 1996.

Benford, Gregory. *Timescape*.

Vista, ISBN 0-575-60050-0, 412pp, A-format paperback, cover by Terry Pastor, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1980; another solid classic reissue from

Gollancz/Vista; if you've never read it, buy it now...) 5th December 1996.

Bunch, Chris. *Hunt the Heavens: Book Two of The Shadow Warrior*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38736-8, 214pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nicholas Jainschigg, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; quickie space opera stuff.) Late entry: 1st September publication, received in December 1996.

Clark, Simon. *Darker*. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-66060-0, 410pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 113.) 5th December 1996.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Mike McQuay. *Richter 10*. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60110-8, 446pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Stephen Baxter in *Interzone* 106.) 5th December 1996.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. *Lethal Kisses: 19 Stories of Sex, Horror and Revenge*. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-480-3, 370pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA [?], 1996; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; it contains all-new stories, and one reprint, by Pat Cadigan, Michael Cadnum, Christopher Fowler, Simon Ings, Roberta Lannes, Jonathan Lethem, Pat Murphy, Joyce Carol Oates, Mike O'Driscoll, Ruth Rendell [the reprint], Michael Marshall Smith, Michael Swanwick & Jack Dann, and Thomas Tessier, among others.) December 1996.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. *Twists of the Tale: Cat Horror Stories*. Dell, ISBN 0-440-21771-7, xiv+366pp, A-format paperback, \$5.50. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains mainly new stories, and some reprints, all about pussycats, by William S. Burroughs [!], Michael Cadnum, Storm Constantine, Harvey Jacobs, Stephen King, Kathe Koja & Barry N. Malzberg, Nancy Kress, Joel Lane, Tanith Lee, Joyce Carol Oates, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, Martha Soukup and Jane Yolen, among others; Datlow is fast becoming one of the most prolific, as well as one of the best, anthologists of our time; note the number of British writers she gives opportunities to; I do believe this is the first Dell book *Interzone* has ever been sent for review.) November 1996.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. *Black Thorn, White Rose*. "A modern book of adult fairytales." Signet, ISBN 0-45-118444-0, xliii+386pp, A-format paperback, cover by Edward Burne-Jones, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first published in the UK, 1988; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 29; this is the first US edition.) Late entry: 1st September publication, received in December 1996.

ber 1996.

Deighton, Jack. *A Son of the Rock: A Space Libretto*. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-452-9, 374pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; "Jack Deighton" is a pseudonym for Dr Jack D. Stephen [born 1953]; this is a debut novel by a new Scottish author whose short stories have appeared in David Garnett's *New Worlds* anthologies and in *Interzone*; Ian McDonald commends it on the cover.) 6th February 1997.

Edwards, Graham. *Dragon-storm*. "The ultimate dragon saga continues." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648022-5, 441pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a follow-up to *Dragoncharm*, reviewed by Chris Morgan in *Interzone* 98.) Late entry: 2nd September publication, received in November 1996.

Feintuch, David. *Challenger's Hope*. "The Second Voyage in the Seafort Saga." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-435-9, 407pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Youll, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995; the author won the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer on the basis of the novels in this "military sf" series.) 5th December 1996.

Feist, Raymond E. *Rise of a Merchant Prince*. "Volume Two of the Serpentwar Saga." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649701-2, x+479pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) Late entry: 21st October publication, received in November 1996.

Flynn, Michael. *The Forest of Time and Other Stories*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85526-5, 381pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; nine stories, most of them reprinted from *Analog*, plus a novella, "Melodies of the Heart"; David Hartwell, the book's editor, rates Flynn as a "core creator of hard sf" and "the best new writer to emerge from *Analog* in the past decade.") April 1997.

Foster, Alan Dean. *Mid-Flinx*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40644-3, 346pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1995; latest in the "Flinx of the Commonwealth" series of adventures which began with Foster's first published novel, *The Tar-Aym Krang*, in 1972.) Late entry: 1st October publication, received in November 1996.

Gemmell, David. *Last Sword of Power: The Stones of Power, Book Two*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37901-2, 310pp, A-format paperback, cover by Royo, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1988; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 29; this is the first US edition.) Late entry: 1st September publication, received in December 1996.

Gentle, Mary. *Ancient Light*. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60112-4, 728pp,

A-format paperback, cover by Christopher Brown, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 23; this was the follow-up to the author's best-selling *Golden Witchbreed*. 5th December 1996.

Goodkind, Terry. *Blood of the Fold*. "The Sword of Truth." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-490-0, 464pp, hardcover, cover by Kevin Murphy, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; although the publishers don't say so on title page or cover, this is the third in the sequence which began with *Wizard's First Rule* and *Stone of Tears*.) 16th December 1996.

Gordon, Frances. *The Burning Altar*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-5238-6, 442pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996; "Frances Gordon" is a pseudonym of fantasy writer Bridget Wood.) 12th December 1996.

Hambly, Barbara. *Mother of Winter*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39722-3, 323pp, hardcover, cover by Donato Giancola, \$23. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a belated sequel to the author's early "Darrow" trilogy.) Late entry: 3rd October publication, received in November 1996.

Hodgson, William Hope. *The House on the Borderland*. Afterword by Iain Sinclair. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-67510-1, 188pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £5.99. (Horror/sf novel, first published in 1908; this is a straight reprint, complete with Sinclair's interesting if quirky afterword, from the Grafton Books edition of 1990.) 5th December 1996.

Holdstock, Robert. *Ancient Echoes*. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648000-4, 405pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Elizabeth Counihan in *Interzone* 111.) 2nd December 1996.

Holt, Tom. *My Hero*. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-387-5, 314pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Lee, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 113.) 5th December 1996.

Jordan, Michael. *Cults: Prophecies, Practices & Personalities*. Carlton Books, ISBN 1-85868-167-7, 128pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Large-format, copiously-illustrated guide to cults and cranky sects, from the Lascaux cave paintings and ancient druid rites to recent unpleasant events at "Jonestown," Guyana, and Waco, Texas; first edition; an odd thing about this book is that it doesn't mention its publisher's name anywhere [we only know it's from Carlton because of the accompanying review slip]; nor is a printer's address given; isn't it illegal to put a book on the mar-



ket without a responsible party's name or address somewhere? — certainly that always used to apply to political pamphlets and the like; maybe an ISBN suffices these days for legal purposes; perhaps the publishers are trying to hide from the possible wrath of assorted loonies.) Late entry: 24th October publication, received in November 1996.

Kearney, Paul. **Hawkwood's Voyage: Book 1 of The Monarchies of God.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60034-9, 382pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 108.) 14th November 1996.

Kotker, Joan G. **Dean Koontz: A Critical Companion.** "Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers." Greenwood Press, ISBN 0-313-29528-X, xi+184pp, hardcover, £23.95. (Critical primer on a leading American horror novelist; first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price, and it's distributed in the UK by Eurospan, 3 Henrietta St., London WC2E 8LU; the latest in a series which includes recent volumes on Virginia Andrews, Michael Crichton, Stephen King, Anne McCaffrey, John Saul and a number of non-sf/fantasy/horror authors; we've seen no examples of this series before now, but it looks to be a useful one: reasonably priced [by Greenwood Press standards], clearly written, and slanted towards students and intelligent fans rather than academics; further volumes are promised [or possibly are already out — the publishers don't make it clear] covering Arthur C. Clarke, Robin Cook, Anne Rice and others.) Late entry: October publication, received in November 1996.

Kress, Nancy. **Oaths and Miracles.** Roc, ISBN 0-45-145577-0, 298pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 106.) 12th December 1996.

Kurtz, Katherine, and Deborah Turner Harris. **Death of an Adept: A Novel of The Adept.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00367-2, 454pp, hardcover, cover by Joe Burleson, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; fifth in the "Adept" series.) 1st December 1996.

Le Guin, Ursula K. **City of Illusions.** "The Hainish Novels." Vista, ISBN 0-575-60128-0, 192pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1967; originally this was one of Le Guin's humble little paperback originals, published by Ace Books.) 5th December 1996.

Leiber, Fritz. **The Dealings of Daniel Kesserich: A Study of the Mass-Insanity at Smithville.** Illustrated by Jason van Hollander. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85408-0, 125pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf/horror novella, first edition; proof copy received; writ-

ten in 1936, when the 26-year-old Leiber was in close correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft, this is the apprentice's tribute to the master's style; apparently the never-published manuscript, revised by Leiber for likely publication in *Unknown* in the early 1940s, before that magazine's sudden demise, was mislaid in the 1950s and has only just come to light — quite a find!) March 1997.

Lumley, Brian. **Necroscope: Resurgence. The Lost Years: Volume 2.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85948-1, 414pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK as *Necroscope: The Lost Years, Volume II*, 1996.) November 1996.

Maginn, Simon. **Methods of Confinement.** Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99708-0, 252pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first edition; Brighton-based Maginn, who once contributed a story to *Interzone*, graduates to "snob-back" format with this, his fourth novel.) 12th December 1996.

Martin, George R. R. **Fevre Dream.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60005-5, 350pp, A-format paperback, cover by Danny Flynn, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1982; about a 19th-century riverboat and her mysterious captain, this book has now gained the patina of a "classic.") 5th December 1996.

Moorcock, Michael. **Elric of Melniboné.** "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. 8." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 0-75280-632-7, 690pp, A-format paperback, cover by Robert Gould, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in 1993; it contains the novels *Elric of Melniboné* [1972], *The Fortress of the Pearl* [1989] and *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* [1976] plus the novellas "The Dreaming City" [1961], "While the Gods Laugh" [1962] and "The Singing Citadel" [1970], and a short preface by the author; there are a map and internal decorations by artist James Cawthorn.) 2nd December 1996.

Moorcock, Michael, ed. **New Worlds Magazine: Fiftieth Anniversary Issue.** Jayde Design [45 St Mary's Mansions, St Mary's Terr., London W2 1SH], ISBN 0-9520074-2-8, 64pp, paperbound, £10. (Celebratory issue of New Worlds sf magazine, here presented as a "book" with an ISBN and a suitably high price; first edition; it's approximately American quarto size, stapled, with a fairly thick glossy cover; inside, it's numbered "Vol. 63, No. 221" and dated "Winter, 1996"; the contents — fiction, non-fiction and poetry, mostly original but some of it reprinted from obscure sources — are by Peter Ackroyd, Brian Aldiss, Andrea Dworkin, Libby Houston, Harvey Jacobs, Michael Moorcock, Iain Sinclair and the late Jack Trevor Story; there are also illustrations by the late Mal Dean and others; the publishers of this handsome item are John and Maureen Davey of the small press Jayde Design; rec-

ommended as an essential purchase to anyone who was ever a reader of Moorcock's *New Worlds*, which ceased as a regular magazine in 1970 but has been kept alive ever since as a sporadic small-press publication or as an occasional paperback anthology; its next incarnation, edited by David Garnett [who did the last four issues, from Gollancz], is due in 1997 from White Wolf [an American publishing house, alas].) 20th November 1996.

Moscoe, Mike. **First Dawn: Book One of the Lost Millennium.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00392-3, 280pp, A-format paperback, cover by Joe Danisi, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a new American writer, this one concerns time-travel back to "4,000 B.C.", where, "among the tribes of the Danube River basin," the peaceful hunter-gatherers' existence is threatened by the coming of "a bloodthirsty clan" which has tamed the horse; it sounds as though it may be about the arrival of our linguistic ancestors, the Indo-Europeans...) 1st December 1996.

Newman, Kim, ed. **The BFI Companion to Horror.** Foreword by Ramsey Campbell. Cassell, ISBN 0-304-33216-X, 352pp, very large-format paperback, £19.99. (A-Z encyclopedia of horror cinema, including many entries on writers and themes, and on television, radio and other media; first edition; it's illustrated throughout in black and white, with a few colour pages; the triple-columned pages are packed with useful information; contributors include Anne Billson, Les Daniels, Christopher Frayling, Neil Gaiman, Phil Hardy, Stephen Jones, Mark Kermode, Stephen Laws, Julian Petley, Douglas Winter and others of the usual suspects; highly recommended: edited by one of our leading horror novelists, and produced under the aegis of the British Film Institute, this is a statelymannered Ed Buscombe's *BFI Companion to the Western*, which appeared some years ago; a *BFI Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Philip Strick, is said to be in the works.) 12th December 1996.

Nicholls, Adam. **The Pathless Way.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-434-X, 407pp, hardcover, cover by Kenson Low, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a follow-up to his first novel, *War of the Lord's Veil*; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen].) 18th November 1996.

O'Donohoe, Nick. **The Healing of Crossroads.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00391-5, 321pp, A-format paperback, cover by Vincent Segrelles, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this is the third in a series which began with *The Magic and the Healing* and *Under the Healing Sign*, neither of which we saw; it seems to be "veterinarian fantasy," about a healer-heroine who tends to various imaginary creatures; the author is presumably American, and his first book was chosen as

"an ALA best book for teens in 1995.") 1st December 1996.

Osborne, Cary. **Perseus.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00397-4, 219pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jean-François Podevin, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; this is the third in a series which began with *Iroschi* and *The Glaive*, neither of which we saw; it seems to be fantasy-tinted, planetary-romance, martial-arts adventure stuff, by an author who is probably female and American.) 1st December 1996.

Palmer, Jessica. **Human Factor.** Point SF, ISBN 0-590-13385-3, 281pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Wyatt, £3.99. (Young-adult sf novel, first edition; a follow-up to the same author's *Random Factor*.) November 1996.

Potter, J. K. **Neurotica: Images of the Bizarre.** Introduction by Lydia Lunch. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-359-1, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £13.99. (Art collection by a leading fantasy/horror photographer-cum-artist; first edition; another striking [and disturbing] book by this major talent; the main text is by Potter himself; it was originally advertised for August [see IZ 111], but was delayed by three months; recommended.) November 1996.

Pullman, Philip. **Northern Lights.** Scholastic/Point, ISBN 0-590-13961-4, 399pp, B-format paperback, cover by Stuart Williams, £4.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1995; winner of the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Award; if the hype is to be believed, this book is the fantasy sensation of recent times, the new Tolkien come at last — a pity the UK publishers didn't send us the hard-cover edition in 1995; the author is British and previously has written a number of kids' novels as well as a trilogy of "Victorian thrillers"; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 110 under its American title, *The Golden Compass: His Dark Materials, Book One*.) Late entry: October publication, received in November 1996.

Robertson, Wendy. **Cruelty Games.** Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-5177-2, 214pp, hardcover, cover by Derek Colligan, £16.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; the author is British and has previously written children's books and at least five adult historical novels.) 19th December 1996.

Royle, Nicholas, ed. **The Tiger Garden: A Book of Writers' Dreams.** Foreword by Anthony Stevens. Serpent's Tail, ISBN 1-85242-533-4, xvi+271pp, B-format paperback, cover designed by John Oakey, £9.99. (Anthology of descriptions of dreams, first edition; among the many, many contributors are Kathy Acker, Joan Aiken, Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Scott Bradfield, Poppy Z. Brite, Molly Brown, Christopher Burns, Ramsey Campbell, Jonathan Carroll, Storm Constantine, Peter Crowther, Rikki Ducornet, Dennis



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Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Neil Gaiman, Stephen Gallagher, David Garnett, Colin Greenland, Joe Haldeman, M. John Harrison, Robert Holdstock, Robert Irwin, Peter James, Graham Joyce, Garry Kilworth, Stephen Laws, Doris Lessing, Ian R. MacLeod, Michael Moorcock, Mark Morris, Kim Newman, Joyce Carol Oates, Christopher Priest, Geoff Ryman, Michael Marshall Smith, Peter Straub, D. M. Thomas, Lisa Tuttle, Lawrence Watt-Evans, F. Paul Wilson and Jack Womack; there are many famous mainstream names, including some, such as Franz Kafka and Jack Kerouac, who are long-deceased; most of the material by living writers is original; royalties from the book go to Amnesty International.) 2nd December 1996.

Schenkel, Peter. *The Message from Yon*. Minerva Press, ISBN 1-85863-441-5, 276pp, small-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf "novel," first edition; this may be a vanity-press product, but it looks to be quite an interesting one; the author is a Slovenian-born German of mature years, now resident in Ecuador; the back cover carries a quote from Poul Anderson, no less: "In the tradition of Swift, Voltaire and Wells, *The Message from Yon* looks at our world through the eyes of a higher civilization, free from our hatreds, greeds and superstitions.") No date shown: received in November 1996.

Shatner, William. *Tek Money*. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00390-7, 307pp, A-format paperback, cover by Donato Giancola, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; seventh in the series, it was ghost-written by Ron Goulart, as Shatner more or less admits in a prefatory note: "Toiling in his toilet and sometimes at his desk, Ron Goulart has written his little heart out. His work on these novels has been unheralded for the most part, and I would like to blow a trumpet for him right now. Hail to Ron Goulart, noblest scribe of the Tek World.") December 1996.

Shinn, Sharon. *Archangel*. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648257-0, 390pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; probably the first book by this popular American author [born 1957] to be published in Britain, it's billed as a "fantasy romance"; it begins: "The angel Gabriel went to the oracle on Mount Sinai, looking for a wife..." — and yes, it really is about the love-lives of angels.) 18th November 1996.

Sinclair, Alison. *Blueheart*. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-458-7, 348pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; British-Canadian scientist Sinclair's second novel; Lucius Shepard is quoted on the cover, praising its "strong narrative, its intelligence and scope"; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen].) 18th November 1996.

Sterling, Bruce. *Schismatrix*

Plus. "At last, in one stunning volume — every word ever written on the Shapers-Mechanists Universe... With a new introduction by the author!" Ace, ISBN 0-441-00370-2, viii+321pp, C-format paperback, cover by Danilo Ducak, \$13. (Sf omnibus, first edition; it contains the novel *Schismatrix* [1985] and selected stories from the collection *Crystal Express* [1989].) 1st December 1996.

Stine, R. L. *Superstitious*. "The world's bestselling horror writer." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-649839-6, 390pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the author has become a mega-bestselling children's writer in America — hence the shout-line on the cover of this book implying that he has outstripped even King and Koontz; this appears to be his first adult novel.) 2nd December 1996.

Summer, Mark. *Devil's Tower*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40209-X, 340pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; by a fairly new American writer who has previously written kids' gaming books, this one is an alternative-history western fantasy novel, featuring the infamous General Custer, and described by the publishers as being "in the tradition of Orson Scott Card's classic *Alvin Maker* series.") Late entry: 1st October publication, received in December 1996.

Taylor, Roger. *Arash-Felloren*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1743-2, 346pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Harrison, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 12th December 1996.

Tepper, Sheri S. *Gibbons Decline and Fall*. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224650-3, 404pp, hardcover, cover by Stuart Bodek, £16.99. (Sf/fantasy novel; first published in the USA, 1996; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; despite its title, it has nothing to do with the Roman Empire but is set in America in the year 2000; reviewed, favourably, by Gwyneth Jones in *Interzone* 112.) 2nd December 1996.

Tepper, Sheri S. *Grass*. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648269-4, 540pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 35; it was previously published as a paperback original in the UK by Corgi Books and this new edition from a different publisher retains their cover art — a rare occurrence.) 2nd December 1996.

Turtledove, Harry. *Worldwar: Striking the Balance*. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68490-9, xi+514pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Alternative-history sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; conclusion to the tetralogy begun with *Worldwar: In the Balance*, *Worldwar: Tilting the Balance* and *Worldwar: Upsetting the Balance*.) 5th December 1996.

VanderMeer, Jeff. *The Book of*

Lost Places: The Selected Works of Jeff VanderMeer. Illustrated by Roger Gerberding. Introduction by Mark Rich. Dark Regions Press [PO Box 6301, Concord, CA 94524, USA], ISBN 1-888993-06-5, 116pp, small-format paperback, \$8.95. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; this is by the author of the novella *Dradin in Love: A Tale of Elsewhen & Otherwhere* which is reviewed by Brian Stableford in this issue of *Interzone*.) 1st December 1996.

Welch, Jane. *The Lost Runes: Book Two of the Runespell Trilogy*. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648200-7, xii+608pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) Late entry: 21st October publication, received in November 1996.

White, T. H. *The Once and Future King: The Complete Edition*. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648301-1, 825pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £7.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition in this form; the original, smaller, omnibus was first published in 1958 and its four constituent novels, *The Sword in the Stone*, "The Queen of Air and Darkness" [originally *The Witch in the Wood*], *The Ill-Made Knight* and "The Candle in the Wind," were first published in 1938, 1939, 1940 and 1958; this new version contains a fifth novel, the posthumous *Book of Merlyn* [1977] and an afterword by Sylvia Townsend Warner

[White's biographer and a notable fantasy author in her own right]; throw away your crumbling old Fontana paperback: this is the edition to have; unlike the recent American trade paperback edition from Ace Books [which is handsomer but doesn't include *The Book of Merlyn*] the publishers don't label this fine volume "The World's Greatest Fantasy Classic!" — they just call it "an abiding classic"; but then HarperCollins/Voyager are also the publishers of Tolkien.) 2nd December 1996.

Williams, Michael. *Arcady*. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-67448-2, vii+486pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick van Houten, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 112.) 5th December 1996.

Williamson, Jack. *The Black Sun*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85937-6, 352pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a new tale of space colonization from sf's longest-established author; Williamson begins to resemble a real-life science-fiction story himself: next year he'll be celebrating his 70th anniversary as a professionally published sf writer [actually, Britain's Naomi Mitchison has been around longer; she is now 99, and her first novel, *The Conquered*, appeared in 1923, but her first sf novel, *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, didn't come until 1962].) February 1997.

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and share-crops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

Betancourt, John Gregory, ed. *The Sci-Fi Channel Trivia Book*. Boulevard, ISBN 1-57297-110-X, viii+422pp, C-format paperback, \$15. (Illustrated quiz-book devoted to film-and-TV sf, fantasy and horror; first edition; a "Byron Preiss Multimedia Company, Inc" packaged product.) 1st November 1996.

Carey, Diane. *Trials and Tribulations*. "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine." Introduction by David Gerrold. Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00902-8, 180pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (SF TV-series episode novelization, first published in the USA, 1996; it's based on a screenplay by Ronald D. Moore and Rene Echevarria, inspired by David Gerrold's "Trouble with Tribbles" episode for the first Star Trek series; this is the American first edition with a British price printed on the flap.) December 1996.

Cox, Greg. *Operation A.I.M.* "Iron Man." Illustrated by Tom Morgan. Boulevard, ISBN 1-57297-195-9, 291pp, A-format paperback, cover by Morgan, \$5.99. (Sf comics-spinoff novel, first edition; a "Byron Preiss Multimedia Company, Inc" packaged book, based on the Marvel Comics character.) 1st December 1996.

Cronenberg, David. *Crash*. Faber and Faber, ISBN 0-571-19127-4, xix+65pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Film script based on J. G. Ballard's 1973 novel of the same title; first edition; the introduction consists of an edited version of Chris Rodley's interview with Cronenberg which first appeared in *Sight and Sound*, June 1996; the movie, which stars James Spader, Deborah Unger and Elias Koteas [with bigger names Holly Hunter and Rosanna Arquette in smaller parts], won a "Special Jury Prize" at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1996; since then, it has been released in France and Canada to considerable commercial success; most of us in the UK and the USA have had little chance to see it yet, but now we have the script to judge it by; it certainly seems a powerful and uncompromising work, and very faithful to Ballard's book despite obvious changes such as updating the action from the 1970s to the 1990s and moving it from London to Toronto [also, JGB's spectacular but probably unfilmable climax, the LSD trip, is lost — replaced by a brief scene set in a tattoo parlour]; is it



sf?: Ballard himself has been ambiguous about that over the years, but interestingly Cronenberg does seem to view it as sf: "What is maybe difficult or baffling about *Crash*, the sci-fi-ness, comes from Ballard anticipating a future pathological psychology. It's developing now, but he anticipates it being even more developed in the future. He then brings it back to the past – now – and applies it as though it exists fully formed. So I have these characters who are exhibiting a psychology of the future.") November 1996.

Dillard, J. M. **First Contact.** "Star Trek." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00316-X, 276pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Sf movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1996; it's based on the screenplay by Brannon Braga and Ronald D. Moore for the new film *Star Trek: First Contact*; there is a lengthy afterward by Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens on the making of the film, and eight pages of colour photographs; this is the American first edition with a British price printed on the flap.) December 1996.

Doohan, James, with Peter David. **Beam Me Up, Scotty: Star Trek's "Scotty" -in His Own Words.** Pocket, ISBN 0-671-52056-3, 215pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Autobiographical reminiscences of the actor who played chief engineer Scott in the 1960s sf TV series; first published in the USA, 1996; it contains 16 pages of black-and-white photographs; this is the American first edition with a British price printed on the cover.) 2nd December 1996.

Gross, Edward, and Mark A. Altman. **Captain's Logs Supplemental: The Unauthorized Guide to the New Trek Voyages.** "The only one-volume guide to Deep Space Nine, Voyager, and the new Next Generation movie." Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-88354-9, 185pp, very large-format paperback, £12.99. (Illustrated episode guide to the various recent sf TV series spun off from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; first published in the USA, 1996.) 18th November 1996.

Haber, Karen. **Bless the Beasts.** "Star Trek: Voyager, #10." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-56780-2, 274pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) December 1996.

Howarth, Chris, and Steve Lyons. **The Completely Useless Encyclopedia.** "Doctor Who." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20485-9, ix+210pp, A-format paperback, cover by Andrew Skillett, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff trivia book, first edition; it has alphabetically arranged entries, interspersed with various silly lists such as "Nine Doctor Who Stars Who've Bared All"; on the back cover the book is blurb as "a desperate attempt to cash in on the popular BBC TV series.") 5th

December 1996.

Lavery, David, Angela Hague and Marla Cartwright, eds. **"Deny All Knowledge": Reading the X-Files.** Faber and Faber, ISBN 0-571-19141-X, viii+233pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Anthology of academic essays on the sf/horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first published in the USA [by Syracuse University Press], 1996; this is pretty much the same sort of book as *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek*, listed here last month, but that was issued in the UK by an obscure academic publisher; it says a lot for the popularity of *The X-Files* that this one is being put out in Britain for the general market, by Faber, a publisher not normally associated these days with sf and fantasy; as we said of the *Trek* volume, this looks as though it may be the first interesting book about *X-Files*.) 2nd December 1996.

Leigh, Mark, and Mike Lepine. **The Extra-Terrestrial's Guide to The X-Files.** "The X-files tell you only half the story." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7744-3, 144pp, C-format paperback, £7.99. (Illustrated humour book, taking the mickey out of the sf/horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first edition; the authors are British TV comedy writers.) 14th November 1996.

Lofficier, Jean-Marc. **The Nth Doctor.** "Doctor Who." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20499-9, 245pp, A-format paperback, cover by Colin Howard, £4.99. (Sf TV-series companion, first edition; this is an account of *Doctor Who* movies which were never made, with extracts from hitherto unpublished scripts by Johnny Byrne, Denny Martin Flinn and others.) 16th January 1997.

Lowry, Brian. **Trust No One Out There: The Official Third Season Guide to The X-Files.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-638836-1, xxi+262pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated companion to the sf/horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first published in the USA, 1996.) 18th November 1996.

Mortimore, Jim. **Eternity Weeps.** "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20497-2, 246pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; oddly, the "Doctor Who" logo is missing from this one – perhaps something to do with the fact that Virgin's franchise is running out: the BBC, reportedly, have clawed back the rights to the character.) 16th January 1997.

Noon, Jeff. **Automated Alice.** Illustrated by Harry Trumbore. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40808-0, 252pp, hardcover, cover by John Tenniel and Ian Murray, £14.99. (Sequel by another hand to Lewis Carroll's "Alice" books; first edition; in which Alice time-travels from 1860 to 1998...; a nicely produced book, ingeniously written, it's actually more of an sf satire

than a juvenile fantasy [but then it's sometimes forgotten that Carroll's originals were "Menippean satires" too, as was Charles Kingsley's curiously Rabelaisian *The Water Babies*]; recommended.) 14th November 1996.

Okuda, Michael and Denise. **Star Trek Chronology: The History of the Future.** "Revised and updated!" Pocket, ISBN 0-671-53610-9, x+342pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Sf television-and-film shared-universe concordance; the original edition appeared in 1993; this new version appears to be twice the size of the old volume, and it's illustrated throughout in colour; good value for those who are interested; this is the American edition of December 1996 with a British price added.) December 1996.

Peel, John. **The Death of Princes.** "Star Trek: The Next Generation, #44." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-56808-6, 276pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) January 1997.

Pilato, Herbie J. **Bewitched Forever: The Immortal Companion to Television's Most Magical Supernatural Situation Comedy.** Foreword by William Asher. Summit [1 Arlington Centre, 1112 East Copeland Rd., 5th Floor, Arlington, TX 76011, USA], ISBN 1-56530-225-7, xiii+272pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Companion to the 1960s fantasy TV series which starred the late Elizabeth Montgomery; first edition; proof copy received; there have already been books on *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters*, the other two great US fantasy sitcoms of the 60s, so this new one is welcome: it looks to be well produced and fully detailed, but there are too many words in the subtitle – why should this author be allowed to refer to his own book as "immortal"?) December 1996.

Sanderson, Pete. **Marvel Universe.** Virgin, ISBN 1-85227-646-0, 256pp, hardcover, £35. (Profusely illustrated guide to Marvel Comics' characters; first published in the USA, 1996; like Virgin's two earlier books by Les Daniels, on the history of Marvel and the history of DC Comics, this is a big plush volume with a substantial text; recommended to all those who have been Marvel enthusiasts at one time or another.) 21st November 1996.

Sargent, Pamela, and George Zebrowski. **A Fury Scorned.** "Star Trek: The Next Generation, #43." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-52703-7, 275pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price added; gosh! – Sargent and Zebrowski, Woman of Wonder and Macrolife Man, are writing *Star Trek* novels now; it's sadly reminiscent of that "ele-

phant's graveyard" phenomenon known to film critics – when veteran movie directors of Hollywood's golden age ended up directing segments of TV series in the 1960s.) November 1996.

Stone, Dave. **Burning Heart.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20498-0, 245pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alison Pearson, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 16th January 1997.

Telep, Peter. **Space: Above and Beyond.** "Based on the hot new BBC TV series!" Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648245-7, 258pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1995; it's based on a script, presumably for the show's pilot episode, by Glen Morgan and James Wong; despite the cover's shout-line mentioning the BBC, it is of course an American production, from Fox TV, the people who made *The X-Files* [for which Morgan & Wong have written episodes]; the book is dedicated to one Nicholas Zahn, apparently the author's father, which makes one suspect that "Peter Telep" is a pseudonym for Timothy Zahn.) No date shown: November (?) 1996.

Books Not Received

There are always a few relevant books which UK publishers perhaps should have sent to this magazine for review but which, for one reason or another, they neglected to let us have. Here, compiled from Ian Covell's useful "British Books" listing in Locus, are a few autumn 1996 titles that "got away."

Benson, A. C. and R. H. **Ghosts in the House.** Edited by Hugh Lamb. Ash-Tree Press, hardcover, £22.50. (Ghost-story collection.)

Cornwell, Bernard. **Enemy of God.** Michael Joseph, hardcover, £15.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel; sequel to *The Winter King*.)

Gaiman, Neil. **Neverwhere.** BBC Books, hardcover and C-format paperback, £18.99 and £9.99. (Fantasy TV-serial novelization.)

Holland, Tom. **Supping with Panthers.** Little, Brown, hardcover, £12.99. (Horror novel; follow-up to *The Vampyre*, to which we gave a good review in LZ 93.)

Jefferies, Mike. **Citadel of Shadows.** Voyager, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel; follow-up to *The Knights of Cawdor*.)

Laymon, Richard. **Bite.** Headline, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel.)

Roberts, Andrew. **The Aachen Memorandum.** Orion, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Ian Covell describes this as an "sf future dystopian novel"; first published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1995.)

RAMSEY CAMPBELL collection for sale, including imports and rare items. S.A.E. to Kevin Broxton, 33 Meadowcroft Road, Leyland, Preston, Lancashire PR5 3AH.

SURF RESTORATION LONDON with Molly Brown's *Invitation to a Funeral Tour*. <http://www.okima.com/>

ASSASSIN, the new PBM adventure. For FREE information write to: Bronze Age Games, PO Box 81, Nuneaton, Warwickshire CV10 9YS.

BABAL MAGAZINE. A new forum for short fiction, including sci-fi, horror & fantasy. Issue 1 priced £2.50. Please make cheques and POs payable to S. Kavanagh, 8 Rickman Hill, Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 3DL.

RQC #6 OUT NOW. Sci-Fi/Fantasy short stories: John Light, Adrian Vonner, Darryl Sloan and others. £2 payable to: Gavin Wilson, 18 Worcester Drive, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 8UP.

ALBEDO ONE GOES A4! #12 out now. William Gibson interviewed. Fiction, reviews, comment. £25 for best story. £2.50 (four-issue sub £10). 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

FOR SALE: Science fiction/fantasy/horror magazines, books – pulps, digests, hardcovers, paperbacks, some oddities. 20-page list. Ted Serrill, 555 Old Post Rd., C-15, Edison, NJ 08817, USA.

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BRIGHTON AREA readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of *IZ* or other sf publications lying around – so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

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COMING NEXT MONTH

Storm Constantine makes a welcome return to these pages with "The Rust Islands," a striking long story. There will also be new tales by several other talented writers, an author interview, and all our usual features and reviews. So watch out for the March 1997 *Interzone*, number 117, on sale in February. (Coming soon: splendid new work by Greg Egan, Dominic Green and many others. Keep reading!)



This month's news



Voyager no limits

<http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager>



Congratulations

To Stephen Baxter, author of *The Time Ships*, for winning a number of prestigious awards. So far, his novel has been a runner-up in the Hugo Awards and has won the

British Science Fiction Association's award for best novel of 1995, as well as the John W. Campbell Memorial Award. He has also won the Japanese Seiun Prize for best foreign language SF novel of 1995, with *Timelike Infinity!* Stephen has been described as the successor to H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein. But don't just believe us, the *New Scientist* said, 'The science is right, the author knowledgeable, and the extrapolations a sheer pleasure to read, admire, enjoy... Wonderful stuff! It is a rare thing to find such a good read.' So if you haven't read any Stephen Baxter, then you're missing out. Stephen's latest novel, *Voyage*, is out now in hardback.



STARBORNE Robert Silverberg

'Where Silverberg goes today, the rest of science fiction will follow tomorrow' declared Isaac Asimov, and Silverberg's latest novel finds the characters boldly going where no man has gone before! Earth's decadent society of the 23rd century decides that the unknown depths of space must be explored, in search of a habitable world: a new Eden, where humanity can reinvent itself through the challenge of a virgin planet. With a crew of fifty men and women, the starship *Wotan* confronts the unknown and discovers a cosmos full of problems.

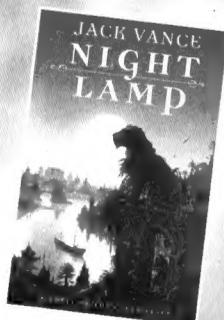
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All of the Voyager crew wish all our readers a Happy Christmas and a Very Merry New Year for 1997 - for the best in SF and Fantasy, remember there are no limits...

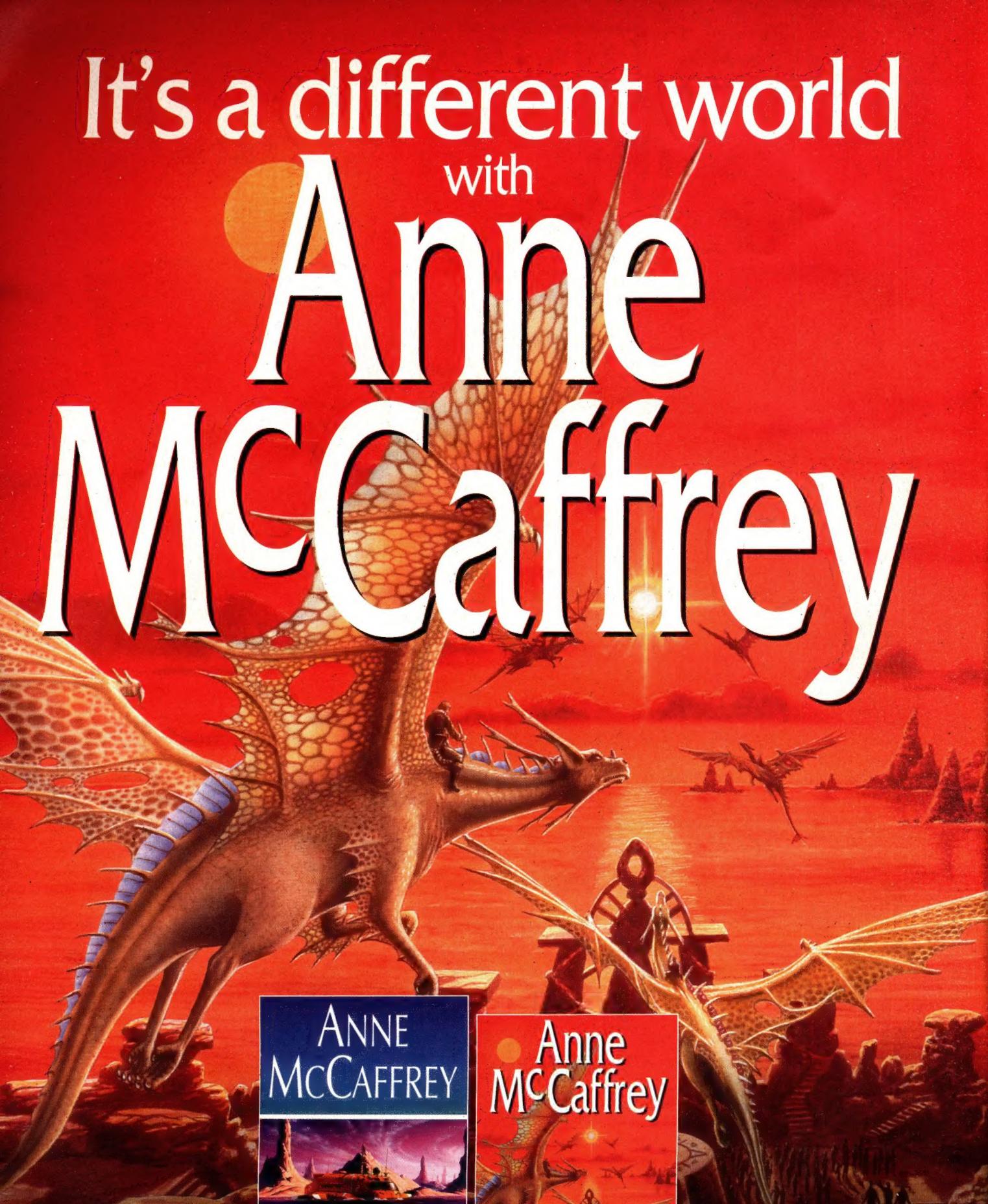
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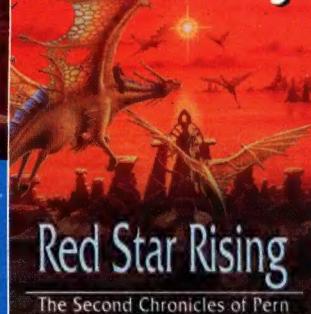
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